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A

GENERAL VIEW

OF THE

DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY;

DESIGNED

MORE ESPECIALLY FOR THE EDIFICATION AND INSTRUCTION OF FAMILIES.

Boston;
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PREFACE.

THE following work contains a comprehensive view of the doctrines of christianity, compiled *principally* from a work of Rev. Robert Fellowes, of St. Mary Hall, Oxford, entitled, Religion without cant; and from various other authors. Upon these subjects, notions dark and confused are often entertained; and men frequently receive and speak of them, without appearing *themselves* precisely to comprehend their import. The object of this volume, it is trusted, is to exhibit such scriptural, evangelical, and at the same time, clear and rational ideas of them, that they may

correctly *understand* what they fully *believe*. It has been compiled with a sincere desire to promote the cause of true christian faith and knowledge, piety, and comfort, and nothing but what it is conceived the scriptures clearly teach, nothing but what approves itself to the enlightened reason and conscience of men, is offered.

Wishing religion to appear, as it really is, our *reasonable* service, and not to teach for doctrines the commandments of men, we take the word of God only for our guide; and submit the work to the public with fervent humble prayer, that God would prosper all well meant endeavours, for promoting the knowledge and prevalence of the religion of Jesus Christ in the minds, the hearts, and lives of men.

As this work is designed for the edification of *families* more especially, it is recommended to them as a valuable manual for the instruction of children.

A

GENERAL VIEW

OF THE

DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY.

PART I.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS UPON THE NATURE OF RELIGION, AND THE MISTAKES THAT OCCUR ON THAT SUBJECT.

1. RELIGION is a principle of holy action in the soul of man. It originates in such a reverence, gratitude, trust and confidence in God, as will lead us to avoid every thing, which we think will displease him, and to study the things which he will approve. This is what in other terms we call the love of God, which is not so much a single as a compound affection; and it is rather an inward principle stimulating holy obedience, than an animal sensation inflaming the

passions. It is not, in every respect, *precisely* like that love which we entertain towards each other, which partakes somewhat of an animal nature, and is, in a degree, allied to sense. But this is a pure spiritual affection, a mental regard, which elevates the understanding, which purifies the heart, and partakes more of *mental reverence* than *animal love*.

2. There are many ingredients which enter into and compose what we call the love of God. In the view of his adorable majesty and glory, religion, or this principle of the love of God, for they are one and the same thing, is varied from ardent affection, and assumes the character of holy awe and profound reverence. In the contemplation of his mercies, it changes its appearance, and seems dissolved into affectionate gratitude. Enduring the evils to which nature is incident, and which chequer the lot of mortals, it assumes the placid countenance of submissive confidence ; and amidst all this variety, it uniformly imitates the goodness which it loves.

3. Mistakes often arise respecting the nature of religion, from considering it rather as a passion, than a principle ; as a pleasing sensation of the animal

nature, than a motive to warm the heart, and to govern the temper. Hence the terms grace and faith, of which very confused, and often the most strange notions are entertained, are sometimes substituted for the sanctity of moral obligation. Grace is in reality a help to goodness, not an insensible something which supersedes its necessity; and christian faith is established, not by rapturous sensation, but by sober reason. Conversion is not miraculous, sudden or instantaneous; for it implies the correction of sinful habits, and the formation of pious principles, which both require time and energy, the first entirely to eradicate, and the last completely to ingraft. Conversion, when real, must spring from the united conviction of the mind, and the persuasion of the heart, working a gradual change in the state of the affections, and in the habits of the conduct. In fine, conversion is no magic operation on the nerves, as it has sometimes been made, producing a violent and unusual thrill in the feelings. It consists more in the rectitude of action, than in the turbulence of sensation. It is the relinquishment of wickedness both in heart and life, and turning to the love and practice of goodness. It measures not therefore the will of God by the false

and varying standard of human feeling, but by what is laid down in the holy scriptures, as the grand test of the reality of religion in the soul. This test is, *a sincere desire to know our duty to God, and our fellow creatures; and, as far as known, a conscientious endeavour to fulfil it.*

4. It is true indeed that the passions or affections are not to be altogether excluded from any part of our love to God. Considered as a means of quickening and promoting the principle, they are certainly both necessary and desirable. But we see on the one hand that too much dependence is sometimes placed upon the mere feeling, whilst the influential principle of it is disregarded; and on the other hand we observe that the principle becomes sluggish and inactive, where the affections do not enliven and render it operative.

5. The author of our nature hath implanted both the feelings and judgment within us; the former to arouse the latter that it need not slumber, and the latter to correct and chasten the former, that directed and controlled by reason, it need not degenerate into wild enthusiasm.

6. The passion of this love will appear in infinite variety, according to the variation in men's constitutional ardour; and persons possessed of the *principle* in equal degrees, may yet possess the *passion* in degrees that are quite unequal. This must be evident to the most superficial observer. As its sensations and its influence are not at all times alike powerful in the same person, so will they vary also in different characters. In some men they will be stronger, and in others weaker, in some they will be more ardent, and in others more faint, according to their different attainments in religion; according to education, to the ardency or coolness of their natural temperament; according to their bodily health or indisposition, and according as age or infirmities may have abated their constitutional vivacity. It would therefore be dangerous to prescribe exactly the same degree of sensations in all, whilst these sensations differ so much, at different times, in the same person; because to do this, might discourage the timid, and yet embolden the presumptuous. Let the humble and distrustful mind, that loves God, but fears it knows him not, take encouragement from hence, and remember that the

scriptures declare, that by this we know we have the love of God, *by keeping his commandments.*

7. Good endeavours on the part of man seem to be the conditions on which spiritual help is promised in the new covenant of salvation. They appear introductory to its infusion, and the medium of its agency. They are associated with the free gift of grace, and grace increases their strength, and facilitates their execution. Wherever there is an earnest striving after moral righteousness, a thirst of the affections, and a labour of the will, to perform that law which is impressed on the conscience, and inscribed on the heart, as in the case of Cornelius, whose prayers and alms had gone up in memorial before God, his grace, or favour, is shed upon the soul.

8. Grace is not only a blessing on the actual exertions of man to do the will of God, but a power given him, to do it more effectually. When grace is thus used, it produces more grace; and the right and reasonable application of the increased and increasing portions of it, which the righteous receive, gradually promotes the growth, and matures the strength of those habits of holiness which lead to immortality.

9. If sensation were the only channel, through which the communications of grace were made to flow, and to which its experience were confined, then it would rather be a pleasure to be enjoyed, than a power to be exercised; it would rather be an appeal to our animal, than to our rational nature; rather an agreeable impulse on the flesh, than a purifying aspiration on the soul. But if moral goodness be the covenanted condition to which grace belongs, *not of right, but by the mercy of God*, and if an increased desire of improving in righteousness, and an increased activity in doing the will of God, be the only true scriptural test of its possession, then grace must certainly be not so much an ecstacy to ravish, as a talent to employ. And it appears from various intimations in the scriptures, and from many analogies in the natural world, that grace must be used if we wish it to be increased, and that it will not be increased if it be not used.

10. The more we labour to do good, the greater aversion shall we feel to do evil. But he who labours to do good, ought always to remember with humility, that he will labour in vain without divine co-operation. He should work, but he should work without pride,

and strive without presumption. He should be animated with zeal, but his zeal should be tempered with caution; he should be resolute, but his resolution should be moderated by a godly fear. As we are totally dependent, every moment of our lives, on the will of him who made us, it is our duty in all we do, plan or attempt, to implore him to *work together with us, and to direct our steps in that way in which it is best for us to go.*

11. The growth of holiness into a habit, or a settled, undeviating disposition of goodness, is not the effect of some momentary glow of devotion, or of some transient longing after God. It is and must be a work of time, as all must know, who understand the evil of their own hearts, the temptations to which they are perpetually exposed, and the conflicts which are necessary in order to overcome the world. Salvation is indeed a work of more difficulty and danger than is generally imagined; because it depends conditionally on the habits of goodness which we form in this mortal life, and which, amidst the temptations by which we are surrounded, and to whose influence we are

almost every hour exposed, seem difficult to acquire, and more easy to lose than to retain.

12. It often happens that men are prone to neglect those parts of the covenant of salvation, on which no clouds and darkness rest, and pay an exclusive attention to the most obscure and mysterious passages in the epistles of St. Paul; to dive into the profoundest depths of theology, and incautiously to pass over the practical commands of christianity, such as our Saviour's excellent sermon on the mount, the writings of the evangelists, &c. forgetting that secret things belong to God; that if some things in St. Paul's writings were hard to be understood in the age in which they were written, as St. Peter confesses, they must certainly be more obscure after a lapse of so many centuries, than they were in the period when the facts to which they alluded were recent, when the dissentions which they were intended to pacify, the heresies they were to combat, and the sophisms which they were to refute, were matters of public notoriety, and topics of common conversation. There are pas-

sages in the scriptures which are clear, as they are useful, and which relate to those duties that are of universal obligation. To attend to these, is our first interest. At the great day, it will not be inquired how logically any man has reasoned, but only how virtuously he has acted; and to have possessed that love to God, the first fruits of which were benevolence and good will to men, will be then of more importance to us, than to have acquired all knowledge and to have understood all mysteries.

13. Forgetting this plain and obvious truth, how often has the fair face of christianity been disfigured, and that religion which is designed to be *a rule of life, and a system of consolation*, been converted into a chaos of mystery, in which the wise and the foolish are alike bewildered....doctrines received as divine in proportion to their obscurity, and important in proportion to their impracticability....reason, that light of heaven shining into the mind of man, to enable him to distinguish truth from error, and what is practical, from what is speculative, rejected as depraved, and the importance of doctrines magnified in proportion as

as they are unintelligible and irrational.* In such a case, religion is not clothed in less awful terror, than profound mystery. God is represented as being angry with men as soon as they are born into the world, only because they are born ; and Jesus Christ as trying to appease his wrath, and to calm his resentments. Hence it is obvious to remark how these persons whose education, or constitutional gloom of mind have led them to embrace such a system, are often the prey of religious terrors, and corroding anxieties. And hence they pay less homage in their devotions to the Father than to the Son, and often address their petitions to the last, without any reference to the first. They characterize the Father by the inflexible severity of justice, and to the Son they assign exclusively the

* If reason be set aside as a judge of truth, all religions have equal claims to faith, the mahometan as the christian, and any absurdity, however gross, stands upon an equal footing with the most rational religion, equally entitled to faith, equally entitled to confidence, equally entitled to credit. Thus should we shut our eyes on the very light which God has given to enlighten our darkness, throw away the compass designed to guide us through the sea of life, and relinquish the only distinction between us and the brutes.

winning attribute of mercy. Whereas it ought to be remembered, that the love of the Father was prior to the mercy of the Saviour. *For God so loved the world*, says the apostle, *that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

14. Those religious opinions, which are productive of the most bitter dissentions, usually relate, not to the weighty matters of religion, but to some inexplicable tenets or frivolous forms; not to essential matters of belief, but to points about which men may differ without erring from the way of righteousness. As members of the same family may think very differently on many little points of domestic interest without any reasonable deduction from those tender regards which the ties of family prescribe, so among christians, diversity of sentiments, on many questions of uncertain doctrine, such as the coeternity and coequality of the Father and the Son, the formalities of the future judgment, and the eternity of future punishments, ought not to engender bitter animosities; for all men cannot think alike, and when another differs from us

we ought to remember that we differ just as much from him; that few persons do not agree, at least in theory, however much they may differ in practice respecting the necessity of purity of heart and holiness of life; and those, who thus acquiesce in believing the essentials of sound doctrine, should not contend about those things which have no reference to righteousness.

15. It is no help to the cause of religion to deny moral duties, or to represent them of no avail towards securing the approbation of God, as though pure morality and pure religion could ever be divided. For to do that, serves to lessen that reverence for practical virtue in the minds of men, which they ought most religiously to maintain. It will induce the supposition, that heaven may be obtained on easier conditions, than those habits of actual goodness, which are slowly acquired and difficultly retained, which cannot be generated without labour, and may be lost without watchfulness. It is to make what some persons call *inward light* a better guide to heaven than purity of heart and holiness of life, and the delirium of sensation a substitute for uprightness of character.

PART II.

THE FREE AGENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF MAN.

1. MAN from the beginning was made an accountable creature, and has continued so ever since. To this truth, which the scriptures fully establish, all succeeding ages have assented.

2. By an accountable being is meant one endued with a capacity to discern good from evil, and responsible for the use of it. The right use of this capacity constitutes religious obedience, and the wrong use, disobedience or impiety.

3. If we are constituted beings accountable for the morality of our actions, or in other words for the conformity of our conduct to the law of our rational nature, which is the will of God, it follows, that we possess not only the faculty of discerning good from evil, but also the free use of it in choosing either the one or the other, as it seemeth to us best; in either conforming, or not conforming our actions to the law

of our nature, or the will of our Creator. We cannot be accountable for impossibilities. We cannot be responsible to the Judge of all the earth, for not using that which we do not possess, or which is not subject to the will, or the rational faculty of man.

4. If we possess the faculty of discerning between good and evil, and yet have not the power, to choose the one, and to refuse the other, the power of distinction would be useless, because it *could* not be exercised; and in this case would it not be tyrannical, that we should be punished for not exercising it? Could such an incapacity be laid to our charge by such a reasonable being as God, who himself made us thus? If therefore we do not possess the faculty of discerning between good and evil, and next of choosing between them, then we cannot be accountable for our actions. And if we be not accountable for our actions, then there is no such thing as a law of our rational nature, to which our conduct should be conformable; for in this case, there would be a law, first which we could not know, and next which we could not obey. It would therefore be no law whatever. For how can that be a law to us, or a law which we can be required

to obey, or responsible for not obeying, either whose obligations we do not know or which the lawgiver himself has, by a *constraint of our nature*, prevented us from obeying, and determined us to violate? Such a supposition would be not only perfectly absurd in itself, but must shock our piety; for it represents also the father of all mercies, as less merciful, than the most unmerciful of all his creatures. It seems strange that any reasonable being can maintain such inconsistencies; that any christian can support a doctrine which so much derogates from the glory, the justice and goodness of God!

5. In what other light can we consider that notion, which represents man as born in a state of total depravity and perfect enmity to God, as bringing into the world with him such a mass of corruption that all his moral powers are extinct, that he cannot even discern good until a supernatural light dispels his moral blindness, and diffuses a beam of illumination on this scene of darkness; that even if he did possess the power to discern, he still would not be able to pursue good, unless by the same miraculous power of God he should be enabled to do it; that this helpless being is

the subject of a law, he thus has neither the power to understand, nor the ability to obey ; that to some favoured beings God imparts this light and this aid, before which they are as unable to do any thing of themselves as a blind man to distinguish colours, or a dead man to rise and walk ; that others have not this power given them; and then that God rewards the first with everlasting life, because they saw when they had eyes given them, and walked when they had feet provided, and punishes the last with eternal misery, because they did not see when no eyes were given them, and did not walk when they were dead. How can christians receive such strange doctrines ? How can it possibly be supposed, that God can be honoured by such notions of him, as would reflect the utmost cruelty and dishonour even upon a fellow creature, and completely disqualify him for all human regards ?

6. According to the foregoing doctrines, men are made mere machines ; righteous against their wills, and wicked against their choice. God vouchsafes his regard to some, which he denies to others, not because the former used their utmost endeavour to obtain it, which the latter did not, for they could do neither

the one nor the other; but because God acts without motive, distinguishes without a cause of distinction, prefers without any reason for preference, punishes where there is no guilt, and rewards where there is no integrity. He first binds the children of men in adamantine chains; is then represented as pitying their bondage; as exhorting, entreating, and beseeching them to rise, whilst he is holding them down, and then punishes them for their obstinacy and disobedience. These are the plain inferences which flow from the doctrine of *total* depravity, that man is born a hater of God; totally averse from every thing that is good; wholly inclined to every thing that is evil, and then meriting the wrath of God for a transgression to which he was not accessory, which he had neither the power to choose or refuse, to perpetrate or to prevent. It destroys at once his moral agency, and makes him no more accountable for his actions in the eye of God and of reason, than the sword of the assassin is accountable for the immorality of his action.*

* Were I compelled to choose, says one, I should rather adopt a religion, admitting even innocent sports and pastimes

7. If God be a moral governor, man must be a moral agent, i. e. capable of choosing good or evil. For without such a capacity, human actions would be no more susceptible of the relations of morality, than the movements of a machine. Moral agency consists in the voluntary preference of good to evil, or of evil to good, and without which, God cannot, with respect to man, be a moral governor; for the notion of a moral government is incompatible with that of a moral necessity. But the doctrine of original sin, as it has sometimes been explained, destroys the moral government of God; because man could not make a voluntary election between good and evil, if he were from the womb wholly indisposed to good, and wholly disposed to evil.

as sacred rites, than one holding up to view our heavenly Father, as an implacable tyrant; enacting laws impossible to be obeyed, and then, for their necessary violation, inflicting punishments unspeakably severe, infinitely disproportional, and terrible beyond conception; and furthermore, representing his favour as conciliated by no other means, than by sacrificing, to what is blasphemously called his glory, the love of our proper nature, implanted in us by himself, and by a cheerful acquiescence in suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, to expiate the unpardonable crime of our existence.

8. Our nature has originally a bias to moral good in preference to moral evil, and when the choice is offered to the will, reason, when it is not darkened, and conscience, when it is not depraved, will prefer virtue before vice with as little hesitation, as we prefer sweet to bitter, pleasure to pain, and happiness to misery. God originally made man upright, and some traces of that uprightness yet remain, amidst all the ruins of his fall. Whatever be the measure of his depravity, it is not total. But, like a stately edifice in ruins, he retains the broken fragments of former magnificence and splendor. In this mixed state, good and evil are promiscuously blended in the same characters; and if on the one hand, we find no perfection of virtue, so on the other, we find no total corruption; but in the same character, a singular compound of virtue and vice, of dignity and meanness; just as in the material world we observe light and darkness, order and confusion, stupendous mountains, and extensive plains blended together. And it is the remains of this *natural* rectitude, which, amidst all men's forgetfulness of God, and neglect of the great salvation of the gospel, which amidst the noise of dissipation, and

pleasures of sin, still points out, that there is a right and a wrong ; which at intervals awakens up the dormant conscience within, and secretly approves the right, which it neglects, and condemns the wrong, which it pursues.

9. If God give to some a power to be righteous, which he withholds from others, it must be a gift granted either with or without any endeavour to obtain it. If it be an unconditional grant, then as some are made righteous by divine appointment, others are made sinners by divine appointment. i. e. Whether they be made sinners or saints, it is not a thing which they could control ;....which at once confounds and destroys all distinctions of good and evil. Now as God is a being of justice and goodness, how are either of these attributes here displayed ? That this good Being has constituted all the generations of men sinners, appointed them to eternal wrath before they were born, and that of all those who come into the world, only a very small portion is elected to salvation, whilst millions and millions are created for no other purpose than to be tormented for ever hereafter !

10. Though it may be difficult to determine what is the precise nature of justice, as it respects the government of God, yet we may conclude it will not *essentially* differ from that, which he has commanded us to exercise in our conduct towards each other. A contrary supposition would be to make him act contrary to his own laws and his own decrees. According to our sense of right and wrong, which is his gift, and according to the spirit and letter of his laws, it would be unjust to punish a man for crimes he never committed, or to hang him for a robbery, which was perpetrated by one of his remote progenitors, and in the guilt of which his descendants could not possibly be involved. If it would be unjust in man, why should we ascribe such a conduct to God?

11. There seems to be no truth in revelation more clear than this, that God prefers the righteous to the sinner, that those who keep his laws are the objects of his regard, and those who violate them, of his displeasure. But if all men by nature are totally, inherently and radically vicious, completely indisposed to good, and wholly inclined to evil, they would all be, in respect to moral qualities, on the same level, and one

could have no better claim to preference than another. Whence then do the scriptures assure us that God does prefer some to others, *the just to the unjust ;* for if all men be thus totally corrupt by nature, God prefers one individual before another, without a cause for preference. But moral qualities can alone form a ground of preference in the sight of a moral governor. Otherwise we make religion a system of mystery, in which all distinctions between right and wrong are destroyed, in which reason is dethroned, and imagination triumphant.

PART III.

THE FALL OF ADAM, &c. EXAMINED.

1. THAT the fall of Adam destroyed the capacity of his offspring to do good, and left nothing in man but a capacity to do evil; that it extinguished the life of religion in the soul, that it estranged all his affections from the law of God, and impressed on his disposition and habits an irresistible bias to all manner of iniquity, are opinions, which it may not be amiss for us carefully to investigate.

2. That the fall of Adam did not destroy the capacity of his offspring either to do good or evil, may be proved from the plain and incontrovertible authority of scripture. In Gen. iv. 7. the Lord is represented as saying to Cain, whose jealousy was provoked by the distinguishing marks of the divine favour which Abel had received: *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*

Here God himself, not long after the fall, expressly intimates, that Cain had a power to choose either good or evil, and that his happiness depended on the choice he should make. In conformity to this passage, St. John says that *Cain's works were evil, and those of his brother righteous.* But if the fall had so far vitiated the nature of man, as to have ingenerated a permanent disposition to evil, and indisposition to good, the works of Abel must have been as unrighteous as those of his brother. In Gen. iv. 5, it is testified of Noah, that *he was a just man, and perfect, and walked with God;* a character totally incompatible with the supposition that the fall rendered human nature vicious and unsound to the very core. Of Job it is said, that *he was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil.* And in another passage God himself is represented as calling Job *a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil.* Now had Adam's guilt been so deeply infused into his posterity as to produce a continual aversion to all good, and an unceasing conversion to all evil, then there could not, after the first transgression, have been a single perfect and upright man upon the whole face

of the earth. But the contrary examples prove, that men were under no natural or innate bias to unrighteousness; and that there were so many sinners in the world, not because sin was a *mechanical necessity*, but because men grossly abused the moral capacity which God had given them. In Acts 10, we read of *Cornelius, a centurion, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.* Indeed, in all ages and amongst all nations, there have been righteous as well as wicked, there have been some who have obeyed, though there have been more who have transgressed the law written on their hearts, the law, whose practice their reason approves, and whose obligations their conscience feels.

3. Our original ancestors were no sooner seated in paradise, than they found themselves in a state of trial. And the trial on which they were put at that time was not the trial of their obedience to the moral law, but to a positive precept. *Thou shalt not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil.*

4. Our first parents when in paradise, where the earth spontaneously brought forth every thing to sup-

ply their wants, and where they were the only inhabitants, were not tried by their obedience to the law of moral obligation, because they could in that state be under no possible temptation to falsehood, to adultery, to injustice, or to any immorality. God, therefore, instead of making their enjoyment of his favour depend on their obedience to the statutes of the moral law, which they had no temptation to violate, made it depend on their obedience to a single injunction, *not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil*, which did operate as a charm on their senses, which was grateful to the eye, and pleasing to the smell, and which consequently exercised their self denial, and formed a satisfactory test of their obedience. Their moral agency therefore consisted in combating the charm of external agency, and repelling the influence of that temptation. The forbidden fruit, acting on their senses, inflamed their appetites, and inclined them to disobedience; whilst the love of him who had provided for them such abundance of delights, and gave them full power to enjoy all the varied luxuries of paradise with this single exception, combined with the fear of incurring the penalty which God had

threatened, seemed more forcibly to impel them to obedience. But, much like their descendants, they seem to have been vanquished by the desire of present gratification. Beguiled by immediate pleasure, they disregarded the more distant consequences. They practised upon themselves the delusions of a self imposture, similar to that which we too often practise upon ourselves, in those cases in which our appetites are inflamed by the nearness of some present, but criminal indulgence. They, perhaps, imagined that if they transgressed, the transgression might be concealed, or the consequences might not be so bad as were threatened. Conscious of the goodness of God, they might fondly hope, that one single offence would not so provoke his wrath, as to cause him to deprive them of all the happiness his bounty had provided, to drive them from his presence, and doom them to destruction. Thus listening to the vain imaginations of their own hearts, they suffered the flame of sensual desire to make its inroads into the soul, till it became too violent to be extinguished. They ate of the forbidden fruit; they violated the injunction of God, and brought death into the world.

5. Hence we see that our first parents were no sooner created, than they were tempted, like as we are, though they had, as we have, reason, and conscience, and freedom of will to vanquish temptation, by the right use and aid of which they might have subdued it.

6. Whence then does it appear that the moral powers of resisting temptation, and of conforming to the law of a rational nature, or to the will of God, were stronger in our first parents, than in many of their descendants; or that they possessed an original righteousness, which has been entirely lost in their descendants? Such suggestions are not to be found in the account of the fall, nor in any other parts of the scriptures. The contrary is rather proved by the history; for Eve seems, as far as can be gathered from the relation of Moses, to have yielded to the first temptation, and to have been vanquished by the first impulse of unlicensed desire. Many of her frail and fair daughters, who derive from her sorrow and travail in the conception of children, seem successfully to have resisted temptations, stronger than these, by which their female progenitor was overcome. And

Adam appears to have complied with the wishes of his partner, with more facility than some of his children would yield to the guilty wishes of the woman they most love. It appears from the scripture, that what *some persons mean*, when they speak of original righteousness, never existed, and consequently could never be lost. For what does the word *righteousness* mean in the language of scripture, or what can it mean in the language of common sense, but a principle or habit of doing right, of obeying the divine will, in preferring good to evil, and obedience to disobedience? Our first parents were not created in, nor born with a habit of righteousness; for if they had been they would have continued righteous. Whereas they either had not, or exerted not the power to acquire such a habit; for they embraced the first temptation to unrighteousness, and transgressed almost as soon as they had an opportunity of transgressing. Besides; Adam could not possess such an ingenerate habit of righteousness, without totally destroying the freedom of choosing between good and evil, and abolishing at once his state of moral probation, which supposes, in most cases at least, something like an equality in he

motives which incline the will to good or to evil. But an irresistible bias to good, which is called original righteousness, would have counteracted any bias to evil, and have annihilated the influence of the motives to disobedience. And that they did not possess this bias appears from this, that they wanted strength and resolution to defeat only *one* wayward inclination to unrighteousness.

7. *God*, say the scriptures, *made man upright and created him in his own image:* that image still remains in all that are born into the world, and nothing but acts of disobedience to the divine will can efface it in us, any more than in our first parents. Till acts of sin are committed, there is a lovely impress of a divine character upon the human nature, such as we behold in the innocence of smiling infants, in whose conscience there is no sin, and in whose hearts is no guile. Innocence or freedom from any moral taint is born with us, and if we die before we have learned to discern good from evil, and have become transgressors by personal acts of disobedience, we die not subject to wrath and damnation, and Jesus Christ hath himself declared, that *of such is the kingdom of God.*

8. We bring with us into the world certain powers, as those of reason and moral sense, which are necessary to us as moral agents, accountable for our actions. If we improve them we continue in the favour of God: if we do evil, we fall as Adam did, under his displeasure.

9. We are strongly inclined to sin from the force of the temptations that surround us, more than from a natural love of sin, as sin. Our state of trial, at present, seems more difficult than that of Adam in paradise. He had only one temptation to resist, and one precept to obey; but a thousand temptations are every where spread around us. Which ever way we turn it requires vigilance to escape a snare; and our duties instead of being limited to the observance of a single precept, embrace a multiplicity of important obligations. We expose, as it were, a broader surface to the influence of temptation; and it requires vigilance and resolution, a sense of duty, not momentary, but permanent, not to do amiss. This may account for our manifold errors, sins, and offences, without recourse to the imputation of Adam's unrighteousness to his posterity, or to the supposition that our actual transgressions are the fruits of

an hereditary depravity. It is a very rare instance that any man will seek by fraud, what he thinks he can gain by justice; and we always prefer compassing our ends by virtuous means in preference to sinful, if we think they will be equally successful in obtaining them. But the misfortune is, we mistake our happiness, and think to effect our views with more ease and more success. Then it is we have recourse to sin; then it is *we deceive ourselves, and put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.* Then it is that our *foolish hearts are darkened,* and we become the sport of wayward lusts, and unclean imaginations.

10. The whole punishment which Adam suffered, and in which his posterity are involved, was an expulsion from paradise, an exposure to bodily toil and misery, and a dissolution into the dust from whence he was taken. Thus the fall did not impress on the will of man an irresistible bias to depravity; but placed him in a state of discipline, in which suffering is nicely accommodated to the perfecting of his nature, in which he has more temptations to combat, and more difficulties to surmount, but where temptations vanquished, and difficulties overcome, will be found eminently to contribute to his improvement in righteousness.

11. It is true that, by the transgression of Adam, his posterity are become *liable* to sin. But it is also to be remembered that Adam himself was made *liable* to sin, or he would not have sinned. And he being the first sinner is said to have *brought sin into the world*. We are all born as Adam was created, upright beings, innocent, yet liable to sin. But there is a wide difference between being born liable to sin, and the being born sinners, totally depraved, and doomed to the everlasting wrath and curse of God, without any personal act of unrighteousness.

12. The great difference between the natural state and privileges of Adam, and of his descendants, is this; that Adam was made capable of happiness and immortality on certain conditions, without even a temporary extinction or suspension of life; whereas at present man is born to trouble, and the grave is placed before him as a necessary passage to an endless life.

13. The punishment inflicted upon Adam for his transgression was natural, not spiritual death,* and

* Spiritual death indeed came on him, as the unavoidable consequence of violating the moral law, but not as the threatened punishment of the first transgression.

his posterity suffer the same. Adam was *punished*, and his descendants only *suffer*, in the same manner as it is said, that *God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*, i. e. the fathers are punished in the sufferings of their children. Now betwixt punishment and suffering, there is a material distinction. Punishment always supposes guilt in the object; whereas sufferings only imply that the sufferer is in a state of trial; and what is there endured is intended to refine the soul, to improve its virtue, and to increase its *final* reward.

14. That an innocent man should be punished is most unjust, because in that man there is no just foundation of punishment. But that an innocent man should suffer is not unjust, because sufferings, as they are experiments and trials of virtue, tend to his improvement, and if improved will be productive of his greater felicity at last. This is the uniform doctrine of scripture; *our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.*

15. But is it not unjust that children should be subjected to suffering on account of their father's transgres-

sion ? By no means. Because children, as such, have no rights. Where there is no right, there can be no alienation of right, and where there is no alienation of of right, there can be no injustice ; as injustice consists in the deprivation of a just right, without the consent or forfeiture of the proprietor. Thus for instance, the present case. God promised to Adam perpetual existence upon condition of perpetual obedience. Now had Adam continued perpetually obedient to the divine command, and thus secured immortality to himself in consequence of the divine veracity, it by no means follows, that Adam's children had any claim of right to immortality, because immortality was to Adam a gift of God ; a gift personal, not heritable ; and to the gifts of God no creature has any right previous to the promise or donation. If then whilst Adam was obedient, and of consequence immortal, his posterity had no right to immortality, much less can they plead any, when their father by disobedience had forfeited immortality. Now if God recompense temporary sufferings duly improved with eternal rewards, who shall complain of injustice in him, because we *suffer* not are *punished* for Adam's sin.

PART IV.

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH IN GENERAL EXAMINED.

1. Faith in general is any kind of persuasion, proceeding from testimony, concerning any thing whatever that is not the immediate object of our own knowledge, of our own consciousness or of our own senses. Whatever truths we hold upon the evidence of sense or consciousness, or by necessary consequences legitimately deduced, these truths we *know*. On the other hand, whatever truths we derive from any other source, be it from the relation of others, or by rational deductions from their depositions, these truths we *believe*. The result of the former principles is *knowledge*, the effect of the latter is *faith*. Religious knowledge is too seldom distinguished from religious faith; which is one great cause why the subject of faith is so often confused and mis-

understood. *Faith* in the very nature of it implies some sort of doubt, because it is an assent of the mind to things we do not *certainly know*; for if we *knew* them there would be an end of faith; as the apostle argues, *What a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?*

2. Faith then is an assent of the mind to the truth of any proposition. Of this assent there are various degrees, from that conviction which is produced by actual certainty, to that which rests only on some faint and distant probability. Of the truth of those things, which are within the cognisance of the senses, the conviction is firm and undoubting. There are likewise many truths which are capable of actual demonstration, or of which the reality may be made so palpable to our perceptions, that we can no more refuse our assent to them, than we can to the truth of our own existence. Of this kind are those truths which are called mathematical, and of which, when the terms are understood, and the several propositions from which they result are clearly and perspicuously explained, and as it were brought home to the understanding, the belief amounts to certainty.

3. No one, who rightly understands the meaning of the terms, can doubt that two and two make four. Our assent therefore to that proposition is firm and immoveable....a certainty or knowledge which excludes doubt. There are other prepositions however, of which the evidence is not so clear and conclusive, and to which the assent we yield is not of so fixed and unchangeable a nature. It does not exclude doubt, or rise up to certainty. Many of the truths, which are the objects of our assent, and the grounds of our daily practice in common life, are of this description. They are not capable of actual demonstration. Their reality cannot be rendered so palpable to the senses as to produce that conviction of the mind, which may be denominated actual certainty or knowledge. They are the result of many probabilities, which amount to what may be called moral certainty ; a certainty, not like that which arises from mathematical proof, but which is suited to a rational nature, and sufficient both to convince the mind, and to influence the conduct.

4. Thus in spring we bury the seed in the earth, in order that it may produce a harvest in the summer. But that the one will be followed by the other, is not

an actual, or a mathematical, but only a moral certainty. We cannot demonstrate the reality of the future harvest. We cannot bring it before our eyes, or make it palpable to our senses. All the grain that is sown may perish in the earth, it may be destroyed by insects, or nipped by blights. It may be wasted by too much rain, or withered by too much sunshine. But from the observations and deductions of many past years, the connexion between seed time and harvest is rendered as it were inseparable in our minds, and we commit the grain to the earth, under almost as strong a conviction, that it will produce a crop, as though we saw it waving over the fields in the fulness of its beauty, and the maturity of its strength.

5. So we engage in a thousand plans of conduct that have relation to the future; in exertions that have reference to distant advantages; in speculations that require some sacrifices of a present and a certain, for a great, probable, but uncertain interest, which results from accumulated probabilities, to which it would be unreasonable not to assent, and on which it would be unwise not to act. In the most interesting scenes, and the most important undertakings of our lives, we are

content to act on evidence which is far removed from certainty, and from the expectation of events, of which the issue cannot be fully known, or the reality completely ascertained.

6. Belief then, we see, is of two kinds; that which depends on reasons, which amount to demonstrative proof; and that which rests on those which are only the calculations of probability. The first is called *actual*, and the last *moral* certainty. When many probabilities unite to confirm any truth; when they are so numerous as greatly to exceed those which favour a contrary supposition, they amount to what may be called moral certainty. And though they may not exclude every particle of doubt, yet they afford a just claim to assent, and constitute a right principle of action.

7. Of this kind is the truth of revelation. It is not a demonstrative, but it is a moral certainty; a certainty arising from many probabilities, to which none of a contrary tendency, and an equal weight, can be opposed. Any sober and reasonable man who should fairly and impartially examine the different degrees of credit, that are due to these two questions; whether

the christian revelation be true or false, will find so many arguments in support of the former, and so very superior both in number and in weight to any, that can be brought to countenance the latter, that upon the closest comparison, and the minutest inquiry, he will assent to the truth of christianity, and confide in the reality of the christian miracles.

8. Faith therefore in the christian religion is an assent to a truth that is highly probable, so probable as to amount to moral certainty. The truth of revelation is not a mathematical problem, of which we can demonstrate the certainty, or make it palpable to the senses, but it is an historical fact, of which the truth or falsehood must be determined by the weight of evidence. For instance: of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we have not mathematical or demonstrative, but we have moral certainty. We cannot, like Thomas, satisfy our doubts by *seeing the print of the nails in his hands, nor the mark of the spear in his side;* yet the fact itself was so well attested at the time; the weight of evidence in its favour is so strong and consistent; it was maintained under such discouraging circumstances, and has been transmitted

to us with so little alteration, that its reality is to us a moral certainty, to which it would be unreasonable not to assent, and on which it would be highly imprudent and perilous not to act. Its evidence to us, though not like that of the eye witnesses of the fact, a sensation which forces conviction on the mind, and excludes every doubt from the heart, is still so clear and convincing, that not diligently to seek to obtain that interest of which it demonstrates the reality, would be called a folly approaching to madness in the ordinary concerns of life ; it would be as absurd as to neglect to sow the earth in spring, that we might reap in autumn.

9. That our present life is preparatory to a future is as probably true, as that seed time is preparatory to harvest. In our worldly concerns, we often act as if some future, but distant interest, at which we aim, were present to us. We do not regard the uncertainties that may interpose between the day before us, and the year to come, when the chances of obtaining the object of our wishes, are greater than those of their being frustrated. In endeavouring to attain that happiness, which faith proposes as the end of our labours,

we are not to be discouraged by any intermediate obstacles, or to suffer doubts, arising from the circumstances in which we are placed, to undermine our conviction, and to subvert our hopes. We should remember that our faith in revelation is an assent, not to demonstrative, but to moral certainty; that it is a trust in the truth of facts, which are supported by highly credible testimony; that it relates to an interest which is not seen, but hoped for; that faith, from the very nature of it, must involve some degree of doubt, it being a trust in the reality of things which we do not certainly know.

10. In matters of religion, a certain degree of doubt cannot be avoided. As the human mind is constituted, and in the circumstances in which we are placed, it becomes necessary as a species of trial. If religion did not admit doubt, the mind would not be active in *believing;* faith would not be in any degree an operation of the understanding, nor would it be different in different individuals.

11. The degree of assent, which different individuals give to the truth, will vary according to the degree

of understanding, the power of inquiry, the exercise of research, &c. and the highest degree of assent will be that in which the persuasion of the truth approaches the nearest to that state of mind, which is produced, not by the evidence of probability, but by that of certainty, not so much by deductions of reason, as the demonstrations of sense. But though religious belief may approach very near to the conviction of certainty, yet it will never be found entirely to reach it. The most sincere believers are subject to moments of distrust, and the most righteous to emotions of despondency. True faith will indeed often make the *future* as it were *present*; but there will be often other intervals, when clouds and darkness rest upon it, when apprehensions of uncertainty will steal into the mind, and sadden the heart. Some degree of doubt will, therefore, in spite of all our endeavours to the contrary, be occasionally mingled with the reality of our faith. Like shadows thrown across our path, they will cast a gloom around us, and perplex and bewilder our way.

12. But though religious distrust will sometimes arise in the minds of good men, it is always to be

resisted. He who cherishes doubts is weak and unsettled in the faith, as he who cavils at the infirmities of human nature is usually wanting in love to mankind. To foster doubts instead of checking their growth, opposing their admission, and counteracting their malignity, is to give them an undue influence, and to incline to scepticism. A good man will indeed maturely weigh every reasonable objection to the truth, but he will always feel a stronger disposition to embrace the good, than the evil; to spread his heart open to the arguments for belief, rather than to give admission to the persuasions of infidelity.

13. The doubtings of a christian's faith go not so far as to alter his conduct; because his faith is still greater than his doubts. When the hope of advantage in any thing is stronger than the fear of loss, the latter, though it may in some degree affect the sensations, will not alter the conduct. The merchant who sends out his ship to a distant voyage, may have his fears that she may be dashed on the rocks, or swallowed up in the waves; yet trusting to greater probabilities of her safe and successful return, his appre-

hensions do not prevent his enterprise, and exertions. It is the same with the doubtings of the christian's faith.

14. Religion is as a voyage, which we are required to make, in order to obtain an interest which exceeds calculation, and to which no present interest can bear any comparison. It is indeed a voyage to eternity; a voyage in which much self denial is to be practised, and our unruly appetites are to be moderated; and most men prefer a voyage nearer home, where sensual pleasures may be more lavishly enjoyed, and in which fewer sacrifices are required. But this is the great and awful consideration; Is not the good which religion promises to the righteous, greater than that which any pleasure in this life can afford the sinner? None can deny the magnitude of religious interest; *yet, as it is uncertain, people flatter themselves that it may be an illusion.* But they ought rather to consider, that in an interest so vast, even a much less degree of probability in its favour, would deserve the attention of every serious man. And how much more ought it then, when reason shows us, that the interest which revelation has unfolded, is in a high degree probable;

so probable as if not to preclude doubt, at least to satisfy the inquisitive, and to astonish the profound.

14. From the preceding remarks we may infer, that that man's faith is genuine, whose conviction of the truth is stronger than his distrust of it; and the more the former sentiment prevails, or the more conviction precludes doubt, the more will the practice of the life correspond with the conclusions of reason, and the persuasions of the heart. The less doubt of the truth that there is on the mind, the greater will be the certainty of that reward which it promises, and the stronger the endeavours to obtain it. The more doubts gather round the mind, and press upon the heart, to the greater distance will the interests of religion recede into futurity, and the more problematical it will seem. As faith increases, goodness will increase also, and as it grows feeble, righteousness will decay. The more mindful we are of the interests of eternity, the less shall we live for those of time; for the interests of the first, when beheld by the eye of faith, will swallow up those of the last.

15. Almost every man has some standard of interest in his own mind, to which he conforms, and by

which, for the most part, he regulates his actions; and happy is he who makes that standard his obedience to the revealed will of God. Other interests are often mistaken, but this can never disappoint him.

16. The distance at which our religious interest is placed, does not diminish its magnitude, though it may lessen its credibility, and make it appear less to us. It does not destroy its reality, or alter its proportions; it only alters its relations to us, in point of space, and our relations to it, in respect to the capacity of apprehending it. The interest of eternity, too vast for our conceptions in our present finite, imperfect state, was wisely made remote, that its proportions might in some measure be suited to our capacity, and accommodated to our situation. Beholding it at a distance, it is but a sparkling star, to which if we would approach nearer, its magnitude would appal our senses. To see it in its natural size, and exact proportions, our faculties must be changed, our senses made more vigorous; this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.

17. Finally. Were the truth of revealed religion a matter of demonstrative certainty, and the rewards connected with obedience to its laws, brought within the sphere of our vision, its brightness would be too strong for our sight. It would likewise be destructive of a state of moral probation. Men's motives would all incline one way, and a bias would be laid on the will too strong to be counteracted. But the wisdom of God appears most eminently bright in his having so arranged the evidences of revelation, as to make faith a matter of choice rather than of necessity, in having just so much obscurity about the reality of the interest, as is fitted to leave it in that state of doubtful light, which does not dazzle the eye, nor put an end to that probationary state, in which divine wisdom has placed us here, and which would be probationary no longer, if the affections were more biassed, or the will more enslaved; if it were not left to our unrestrained choice, either to embrace or reject the truth of christianity.

PART IV. CONTINUED.

RELIGIOUS FAITH, IN PARTICULAR, FURTHER EXAMINED.

1. RELIGIOUS faith is properly that conviction concerning past, future, or unseen things, relating to God, his will, his counsels, or his providence, which is produced in us by the testimony of prophets, whom he hath sent and authorized.

2. Faith is a reasonable principle. There is nothing dark, mysterious, or unintelligible in it; nothing that he, who values himself most upon his reason, has any cause to be ashamed of. It is not an enthusiastic principle, that first gives being to dreams and visions, and then supports itself upon imaginations of its own creating. It is not a supernatural impression, proceeding from the immediate agency of God, capriciously bestowed, where he pleases to bestow it, and denied, where he wills it to be denied. It is not an

inexplicable feeling of we know not what, conceived, we know not how, and cherished, we know not why. It is not the persuasion of any thing, whether good or evil, concerning either ourselves or any other being, taken up without reason, and maintained upon principles, that may not be duly specified and explained. It is not any sudden irradiation of the mind, proceeding from whatever cause. For faith is not more the special gift of God than sight. It is equally the natural and necessary result of principles that compose the human frame. To an eye duly formed, present any object of the visible world, and it is seen. To a mind attentive and undepraved, propose the evidence concerning any truth that respects the world invisible, concerning either distant objects, past transactions, or events yet to come, and in proportion to the strength of that evidence it is *believed*. Whatever persuasion is taken up against evidence, or without it, is blind presumption, or romantic imagination, and not faith.

3. Faith is as much the effect of evidence, as sight is the effect of sensible impression ; nor is the one more absolutely dependent on its cause, or more closely connected with it, than the other. It is a law

of our nature, that in such and such circumstances we shall see ; and it is as much a law of our nature, that in such and such circumstances we shall believe. If we will be judging of such visible things, as are beyond the sphere of clear and distinct vision, no man would call these presumptuous fancies, however strongly he might be attached to them, *sight*. And in like manner, if we would be judging of things invisible, to which the light of evidence does not reach, no man should call these visions of imagination, *faith*. They are both of them the reveries of a capricious and disordered mind ; a partial frenzy, which only requires to be extended to a greater multitude of objects, to render the perversion of our understanding both manifest and deplorable. What sight is to the natural world, with respect to things visible and present, *faith* is in the spiritual world, with respect to things absent and invisible. To believe on sufficient evidence, is as natural as to perceive ; and in thus believing, there is nothing more unreasonable, inexplicable, or indefensible, than in seeing with our open eyes the prospect that presents itself before us.

4. Many of the errors which are usually entertained of the doctrine of faith seem to originate in the mistake, or the perversion of the term, which has various significations, the confusion or ignorance of which has occasioned much dissention in the christian world, and contributed only to perplex those, who, without a critical knowledge of the language of scripture, have attempted to explain the doctrines of christianity.

Sometimes the word *faith* is employed to signify the whole christian doctrine, which is an object of faith. Thus the apostle speaks in the Galatians, chap. iii. 23. Before *faith*, i. e. the gospel came, we were kept under the law. See also Rom. i. 5, Gal. i. 23, iii. 25, 1 Tim. i. 4, Acts vi. 7, and many other passages, where the word *faith* is used in the same sense. Again, it is taken generally for any strong persuasion of the mind, whether originating in a divine revelation, or produced by the force of argument. Thus Rom. iv. 20. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in *faith*." See also Rom. xiv. 22, Heb. xi. 6, in which places faith

denotes nothing more than a *sincere persuasion* of a particular truth.

In other places, faith is used to signify simply veracity or truth, which deserve assent, and as opposed to falsehood, which deserves none. Thus Rom. iii. 3. "Shall their unbelief make the *faith* (truth) of God of none effect?" It is also occasionally taken for those things, which are revealed by God, but are invisible to our perceptions. In this sense, "*faith* is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Sometimes it is put for a simple lifeless assent to things which are not seen; as that there is a God; that he made the world, &c. Thus it is used by St. James, 2 chap. "*What doth it profit though a man say he hath faith and have not works, can faith save him? Thou believest there is one God; thou dost well. The devils also believe and tremble.*" Faith is further used to signify *trust* in the divine promises. In this sense the word is repeatedly employed in Heb. xi. which contains an animated recommendation of this species of faith, illustrated by examples, and remarkable for the warmth of its piety, and the strength of its eloquence.

5. God never left himself without a witness in the world, even amongst those nations to whom he never made known his will by a direct revelation. "*The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, were clearly seen, being understood by the things that were made.* Rom. i. 20. In the beginning God showed himself as the maker of the world, and the father of mankind, as the lover of those that do good, and the avenger of such as do evil. In the interval between the fall and the deluge, God seems more than once to have manifested himself to his creatures. After the deluge, he appeared unto Abraham, with a command to forsake his kindred, and settle in a strange land, with an assurance that his posterity should possess it, and that *in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed.* His faith on this occasion, which *was counted unto him for righteousness*, was an unshaken trust in the promises of God, producing a willing obedience to his commands.

6. We next read of the great Maker of the world appearing under the partial name of the God of Israel, interposing to rescue the descendants of the favoured patriarch, from the oppression of the Egyptians;

afterwards choosing Moses as the special instrument of his providence and messenger of his will, prescribing moral duties for the practice of the people, never to be dispensed with, and ceremonial laws to preserve unbroken the Jew and the Gentile, till *the coming of him, who was to break down the wall of partition between them;* to teach the world that *God was no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him.*

7. In each of these partial revelations, which preceded the christian, the Almighty exhibited many signs of love to his creatures, and gave some obscure presage of that glorious plan, which he had formed for reconciling the world to himself, in the person of his Son, *in whom he was well pleased.* In the Mosaic law, the great scheme of redemption was obscurely insinuated, rather than distinctly pourtrayed in types and figures, in the sacrifices of the altar, and the atonements of the priests. The Redeemer was indeed seen through the rites of the Mosaic dispensation, as through a veil or a glass darkly. They were like the cloud that covered the tabernacle, through which the

eye could not penetrate, and which inspired sensations of awe, without exciting any lively perception of form and character. The prophets, who lived before the Mosaic dispensation, particularly Isaiah, expressly foretold a Redeemer to Israel; but the mode of redemption was left involved in obscurity and uncertainty, till *in the fulness of time Christ was manifested in the flesh;* the spotless sun of righteousness dispersed the shadows of the law, cleared up the mists of the vision, and the perplexities of the prophecy, and shed the light of immortality over the darkness and misery of the world.

8. Hence Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah foretold by the prophets as our redeemer from the grave, and the future judge of all mankind, is the principal object of christian faith. This is the most common acceptation, and the most important signification of the word faith, in the scriptures of the new covenant, and which we cannot too often remember, or too carefully retain. Faith in this sense of the word is necessary to salvation. Thus understood, it is a principle of new life in the soul. It exalts the thoughts, it purifies the affections, and sanctifies the conscience.

9. What constitutes christian faith are these; that there is a God; that he made the world by his power, and governs it by his wisdom; that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, who declared the will of his Father to mankind, who was delivered unto death for our offences, and rose from the grave for our justification; that our present life is a state of trial; that there will be a retribution after death, when all mankind will be judged according to their works, and when the happiness of individuals will be proportioned to their improvement in righteousness here, and their punishment according to the magnitude and aggravation of their sins; that purity is the perpetual law and unceasing object of faith, and that *without holiness we cannot see God;* that in his sight we are all guilty sinners, but that upon repentance, faith and reformation, he is ready to pardon us, and to confer upon us in the end an exceeding weight of glory. These are all the essentials of christian faith. And when they are really impressed on the heart, they will invariably manifest their invisible existence by the outward fruits of piety, holiness, justice, mercy, truth and charity. That faith is genuine, which produces a right practi-

cal sense of moral obligation, as well as of religious ordinances, which induces us to yield a pure, vigorous and habitual obedience to what God has commanded in his word, whether it cross our inclinations, oppose our worldly interest, resist our prejudices, or thwart our most favourite objects. Such is truly a *saving faith*, if it generate kind and beneficent dispositions of the heart, and bring into obedience to the laws of Christ, the manners of the life. "*For the end of faith*," says the apostle, 1 Tim. i. 19, *is* to make us *careful to maintain good works.*

10. Such a faith as this is compounded of the conviction of the mind, and the persuasion of the heart united. It supposes the understanding, from the investigation of the evidence of religion, to be convinced of its truth, and the affections to be interested in the practice of its duties. And where the mind is convinced without the heart's being touched, or where the heart is touched without the mind being convinced, the work of faith is but half finished. The faith of a being like man, highly intellectual, and exquisitely sensitive, should be the united effect of reason and sensation. The reason should be able to discern

and to defend the truth of religion, and the sensations should glow with the ardour of piety. The one cannot be separated from the other without doing violence to both.

11. A faith which thus incorporates the assent of the mind with the persuasion of the heart, is least liable to change or decay, for it is that faith which God, who has given us a faculty to discern truth from error, and who has so disposed the evidences of revelation as not to supersede, but to encourage its exercise, requires at our hands. This alone is the character of that faith which is *a reasonable service*, which is most agreeable to the father of spirits, and to the genius of christianity. Without some degree of rational conviction, our faith is subject to all the alternations and capriciousness of prejudice in some cases, and to its obstinacy in others. *We cannot give a rational assent to what we know not, any more than we can be said rationally to prefer one thing to another, without knowing or investigating the right grounds of preference.* Our belief in revealed truth, like our belief in any other truth of importance, should be rational, that it may be firm. It should be the effect of the under-

standing, that it may remain the subject of the will. From that to which we assent, without knowing why, we are always liable to dissent, without knowing wherefore. Hence we are commanded to *be always ready to give to every one that asketh us, a reason of the hope that is in us.*

12. Our faith, however, may be perfectly rational, and perfectly scriptural, and yet be uninfluential. We read of such as *hold the truth in unrighteousness. The devils believe and tremble.* Our hearts, therefore, if we are christians, must *feel* the truth, as well as our minds *discern* it. The affections must give to our faith its activity and its usefulness; for without works, faith is of no avail. It is the affections which must render religious faith cheering and influential to the individual, and its operations beneficial to humanity.

13. How then is this faith to be acquired? By the use of means....by examining the evidences of religion ....by a diligent and attentive perusal of the sacred scriptures....by comparing the prophecies in the old testament respecting the Messiah, with their completion in the new, in the person, the life, the sufferings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—by a serious

perusal of that wonderful prophecy relative to the dispersion of the Jews which occurs in Deut. xxvii. and which we behold fulfilled before our eyes—by carefully perusing the writings of the four evangelists, of whom at least two were actual spectators of what they related—by considering the perfect doctrine and sinless life of Jesus; the profound wisdom displayed in the one, the patience, the gentleness and beneficence that were visible in the other—by contrasting the sublimity of his character, with the lowliness of his condition; the splendor of his miracles, with the humility of his deportment; the fear which he excited with the little power he possessed; the popularity which he avoided with that, which, had he harboured any ambitious views, he might have acquired—by observing the total absence of any kind of equivocation, duplicity or imposture in every word that he spoke; the prudence with which he conducted himself in the most embarrassing situations; the sagacity of his answers to the most perplexing questions; the meekness with which he endured the most humiliating insults; the silence with which he abashed the scorner; the force and authority with which he rebuked the hypocrite; the tenderness and affection with

which he instructed the simple; the concern which he showed for the bodies and the souls of men; the readiness with which he relieved their wants, and the sympathy which he discovered for their sorrows; he love which he manifested for his friends, and the fervour with which he prayed for his enemies; the fortitude with which he suffered an ignominious death, and the glory with which he rose to an endless life...by humbling our own pride, by laying our prejudices at the cross, by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and learning wisdom there, by humble prayer, by a willingness to admit whatsoever shall appear truth, however it may cross our prejudices, our worldly interests, or our former practices. Whoever with a teachable, meek and humble disposition of mind thus waits upon God, will feel his strength increase, his christian faith both strengthened and confirmed. For *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. They who thus ask will receive; they who thus seek will find; and to them who knock God has promised to open the door of grace.*

14. But faith is the gift of God. And so it is; but then it is no more the *miraculous* gift of God, than any other part of knowledge. If God gives us a faculty to

acquire any thing, he does not interfere to supersede its exercise, or to give us the benefit without that exertion, on which he made it dependent. It is God who gives us the bread which we eat; but then because this is true, whoever imagined that bread was not the product of human industry? And as he gives us not the *bread which perisheth* without labour and toil, can we suppose he will give the better *bread which endureth to everlasting life*, without personal endeavours to obtain it? That he will infuse it into our souls, whether we labour for it with diligence; or cross our arms in idleness? To represent faith then as an immediate, supernatural gift of God, other than what all our powers, faculties and other attainments are, goes to reflect on the credibility of revelation and the rational powers of man; for it makes it a miraculous infusion poured into the soul without the consent of the will. It then ascribes it to a power, superseding the necessity of instruction, and the use of inquiry. It represents God as having communicated a revelation to mankind, of which no man can discover the truth....an absurdity which appears evident from this, that a revelation unless it be understood is no revela-

tion whatever. Hence the scriptures make the distinction. *Secret things, say they, belong to God, but these things that are revealed belong to us, and to our children after us, that we should do them.*

15. Will it be supposed that such a notion of faith is more honourable to God, and more humbling to man? Surely it cannot be so honourable to his wisdom, nor so mortifying to human pride; for it supposes the revelation imperfect, and so incompetent to the design for which it was intended, as to require a *second* revelation to reveal the *first;* a *second* effort of divine power, because the first was insufficient. Here it detracts from God's power, and his wisdom. And how does it humble man? It humbles him in this way only, by filling his mind with the vain notion that he is favoured of God above others; that he has light given im from above, whilst they are in darkness, and wisdom imparted from on high, whilst they grope in ignorance. Is not the natural tendency of such a notion, to beget spiritual pride and pharisaical superiority, rather than christian humility?

16. It ought to be remarked further that it is no more honorary to God to suppose the gift of faith miracu-

lous, or supernatural, than the contrary supposition; for that considers God as its primary author; just as *he* gives, and we look at the light; just as he furnishes our food, a power to place it in our mouths, and a faculty of deriving nourishment from it, and we eat, and are satisfied.

17. Besides, if faith be a miraculous or supernatural infusion, our belief is not a matter of choice, and then a man with no justice can be called to account for not believing. If religious belief be independent on the consent of the will and the exercise of the reason, then certainly with respect to the morality of faith, the believer can prefer no stronger claim to divine favour than the infidel. The believer being acted upon by a power, under whose influence the will is passive, and the reason dumb, cannot help believing; and the infidel not enjoying the same happy intervention of a miracle cannot help *not* believing. Now this being the case, could God, as an infinitely just being, reward the faith of the one, or punish the unbelief of the other; since both then are mere machines, the first taken without preference, and the last left without offending.

18. God has made faith dependent on the exercise of those talents he has given us, because by them we are able to discover the truth of revelation. Hence the doctrine of Christ tells us *to search the scriptures*, to investigate the matter of belief, and in order to stimulate our capacity to do good, it informs us, that *he that doeth the will of God, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* He seems to have made a belief in the christian revelation, dependent on the right application of the reason and the conscience. If we will examine the evidence, without any beam of prejudice obstructing the sight of the mind, or any sinful lust reigning in the heart, the light is too clear not to be seen, and the doctrine too pure not to be acknowledged as divine.

19. The truth is, that in religion we naturally are too apt to be governed by force of imagination. Hence men are prone to be captivated with the mysterious and obscure, delighted with something vast and invisible, which they do not, and which cannot be known, but whose heights fancy exalts, and whose dimensions it expands. What appears before their eyes they think little and dwarfish, because it is not too

vast for their perceptions. What is removed beyond the utmost stretch of the understanding, they prize beyond measure, because it is hid in darkness. Thus they think doctrines important in proportion as they are obscure. What is easy and simple they depreciate, what is difficult they extol; what is obvious they neglect, and where the *wayfaring man* would not *err* they are lost in an endless maze. Too little is it considered that points of uncertain speculation cannot be of so great importance, or they would not have been so ambiguously expressed; that God would not have left any doctrine essential to salvation liable to such strange diversity of opinion, that the most conscientious christians have entertained sentiments the most opposite on conviction of their importance and their truth. But forgetting this, and making imagination, rather than the word of God their guide, or substituting human creeds, for the *simplicity that there is in Christ;* they labour to explore the labyrinth, or to traverse the clouds of mystery, whilst they lose sight of truths, which are pure as they are plain, and which come home to the interests and to the bosoms of all mankind. Observe how different was the conduct of Jesus Christ.

In the sermon which he delivered on the mount, no one dark or doubtful doctrine is started. The whole is one lovely system of practical religion. The doctrines are simple as they are sublime, and the precepts as plain as they are holy.

PART V.

WORKS NOT MERITORIOUS.

1. THE obligations of mankind to the practice of virtue, are immutable and eternal. They necessarily arise from the nature of things; and are without consideration of reward. The recompense of obedience therefore should be regarded, not as the foundation of our obligations, but as the motives and encouragements to fulfil them. The faithful discharge of our duty entitles to approbation and favour; but if any thing further than this is promised or conferred on the good man, it must be considered as a reward of grace, and not of debt; as the free gift of divine beneficence, but not as the ground of just desert.

2. This doctrine is supposed in Luke xvii. 10. and though originally applicable to the attendance, which

was due from the apostles of Christ to their Lord and master, it equally refers to that obedience which every man, as a rational being, owes to his Maker. We are all *unprofitable servants*. *We have done only that which was our duty to do*, is the proper language of humility and of truth, is the proper language of every creature to his great Creator. After the most perfect services we can perform, we have done nothing that can merit the rewards of immortality, nothing but what was our duty, if no such rewards had been promised.

3. The servant, though he performs whatever his master commands him, and discharges his whole duty with fidelity and despatch, is still entitled to no extraordinary reward, nor has claim to peculiar privileges: for whatever he does by order of his master, is no more than his duty, the assiduous and cheerful performance of which, may be allowed to merit his master's approbation, may give him an undoubted right to the wages for which he has contracted, and the benefits that belong to his service. But beyond this the master is not bound in strict justice to confer reward. Thus it is with us as christians. Being the

servants of God, we are bound by that relation to perform the service he requires of us; and having done this, we ought not to overrate our services, or to imagine them entitled to any uncommon recompense. We ought humbly to acknowledge, that we have done no more, than our condition as his servants demands from us.

4. This our Saviour instructs us to consider as our own case, even upon the supposition of a constant and complete obedience. How much more then since our obedience is so defective, and since our best services are allayed with so many imperfections.

5. Strictly speaking there can be nothing meritorious in the best services we perform, because *our goodness extendeth not unto God*, and can in no sense be beneficial to him. Merit implies benefits conferred by the agent on others, from whom he is supposed to merit. The servants of men, by their diligence and honesty have power to promote their masters' interest, and in this view may hold some claim on their kindness and affection. But the servants of God can only by their obedience do good to *themselves*, and promote their own happiness. Though like the Sav-

iour of the world, they kept all the commands of God, without deviation or defect, still are they unprofitable to their master, they are utterly incapable of increasing his glory and happiness, or of rendering the least addition to his perfections. These had remained the same, though angelic natures had never celebrated, nor mortal tongues adored them. *Can man*, says Eliphaz to Job, *be profitable to his maker? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect.*

6. But if upon the supposition of a perfect and unreserved obedience to the whole will of God, it becomes us thus to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants, how much more does this language become us when we recollect the manifold imperfections of our best actions, the failings and defects of our best duties. Where is the man, that can say he has always been as vigilant and as circumspect, as diligent and active in his obedience, as he might and ought to have been? Who can say, that in all the scenes of life through which he has passed, he has in no instance suffered his virtue to be subdued by temptation? Who can say, *I have kept my heart clean, I am pure from sin?* The retrospect of life will present many

unpleasant parts to our view, and excite the wish that in some instances at least, we had acted differently from what we have. How often indeed have we seen persons who have meant well, who in their zeal, untempered with knowledge, have brought reproach upon their religion and themselves! Such instances of frailty or imprudence afford sufficient grounds for humbly renouncing all pretensions to perfection and all claims to merit. Though a merciful God be not extreme to mark our misdoings, though he be ready to accept of sincerity instead of perfection, and of a broken heart instead of merit; yet for erring creatures like man to expect the rewards of immortality, as due to the account of imperfect and interrupted obedience, is a proof of the highest ignorance, arrogance and presumption. The sincere and humble christian, will rather acknowledge that however habitual may have been his endeavours to please his maker, yet encompassed as he is with infirmities, erring as he is prone to from his duty, and his God, it becomes him to be humble, and to confess that he is an unprofitable servant. Confiding in his blessed Saviour he looks forward to a crown of glory, not as the debt of

his merit, but the free gift of divine bounty, not as an equivalent for his imperfect services, but as the reward of unmerited goodness, far beyond his expectations, and infinitely exceeding his deserts purchased for man, by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

7. The little boast we have of merit, and the justice with which we are styled unprofitable servants, appears yet further, in that whatever good actions we perform, or acceptable duties we discharge, the whole power is originally derived from our Maker. To him we stand indebted for all our powers and capacities of action. If we perform an acceptable service to God, the ability was his gift. If we make the right use and application of our powers, it is to him we owe every assistance and encouragement, by which we are enabled to exercise them in a manner the most useful and improving.

In the faithful culture of our talents, and the right application of our powers, it must be confessed there is something amiable and praise worthy, something upon which God is pleased to look down with approbation and complacency, and on account of which he deigns to call us his good and faithful servants. But

when we consider through whose bounty, and under whose guidance and direction, our best and highest improvements are made, when we reflect to whom we are indebted, for the capacity of performing any part of the service required from us; we shall see ample cause, to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants, and to disclaim all pretensions to merit.

Of this lowliness of mind, the apostle Paul was an illustrious pattern. When, to vindicate his own character from the malicious aspersions of his enemies, he was made to declare that *he laboured more abundantly than they all*, the apostles, he closes his apology for himself by acknowledging his obligations to divine assistance, and laying the glory of all his services at the feet of his master. *Yet not I*, says he, *but the grace of God that was with me.* In like manner the best christians, those who have been most eminent for piety and virtue, have been always ready to acknowledge their obligations to that divine power, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, all just works originally proceed; and to whom, therefore, they ought, with all gratitude and humility, to be ultimately referred.

8. To all this we may add the manifest impropriety of making a merit of that which is a mere matter of duty, and challenging a reward for doing that to which we are indispensably obliged. Were there no future recompense promised to the righteous, it would still be reasonable and fit that we should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. As the creatures of his power, we are the subjects of his government. As the daily objects of his paternal care, we are under indispensable obligations of love and gratitude, and should make it the daily business of our lives to render unto him the tribute of our cheerful obedience. All pretensions to merit, with reference to the Supreme Being, must therefore be inconsistent with our condition, as dependent beings, and discover a mind under the dominion of that pride which was not made for man. *When we have done all things that are commanded us, we are unprofitable servants; for we have done only that which was our duty to do.*

Having thus shewn that merit cannot belong to human actions, that they can afford us no claim of justice to the rewards promised in the gospel of Christ, to

sincere obedience ; and that these rewards are of course the fruits of free and unbounded grace,

9. We ought to caution against false and dangerous inferences, which may possibly be deduced from the doctrine we have established. And,

Because obedience to the laws of God cannot profit the Almighty, nor make him our debtor, we are not therefore to conclude that they are unprofitable to ourselves, or unproductive of our own happiness. Different are the lessons taught us, both by revelation and reason. The former instructs us that *godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come ; that the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, and that in the keeping of them there is great reward ;* while experience evinces that there subsists an intimate connection between virtue and happiness ; and that whoever sincerely aims at the discharge of his duty, reaps present advantages from his obedience. *The righteous is* not only *more excellent*, but happier also than his neighbour. Besides laying the best foundation for the enjoyment of health, reputation, and competent worldly possessions, he secures peace also to

his own mind, he enjoys the consciousness of rectitude, and lives in the hope of heaven hereafter. But,

10. As we are not to conclude from the doctrine considered, that obedience to the will of God will be unprofitable to ourselves, so neither are we to infer that it will be unprofitable to others. Though our goodness extendeth not unto God, yet our fellow creatures are interested in it, and much of their happiness depends upon it. The laws of God, like their great author, are holy, just and good; and were they more perfectly obeyed, the condition of human nature would proportionably improve. The happiness of individuals depends much upon the virtuous conduct of those connected with them, as well as on their own; and to those who practice what is *just and true, lovely and of good report*, are we indebted for many of the most valuable blessings of life. Whence spring the miseries of which such complaints are continually made, but from the follies and vices of men? Whence come public wars and private contentions, but from the ungoverned passions of mankind? On the other hand, what blessings do men become to each other, where the duties of morality and religion are strictly

and faithfully obeyed. How is this desert wilderness changed into a paradise, and earth resembles heaven.

11. Lastly. Because our best service and most complete obedience cannot make the Almighty our debtor, we are not therefore to conclude that they are of no value in his sight, or will contribute nothing towards securing his favour. This is a dangerous error, into which some have fallen, through indiscreet zeal against the doctrine of merit, and injudicious jealousy for the honour of divine grace. To say that the good actions of the best of men can give them a claim of right to the everlasting rewards of heaven, to say that good works have any merit in them, is evidently absurd. But to depreciate them; to represent their practice as of no efficacy in obtaining the divine favour, is certainly wrong. It leads incautious men, under the influence of licentious passions, to treat the obligations of morality with indifference; to think it a matter of no consequence whether they be virtuous or vicious, and to separate religion from morality; to dissolve moral obligations, and open a wide door to dissoluteness and impiety. Though a servant may not merit reward of his master for the punctual dis-

charge of his duty; still in such a discharge he may meet his master's approbation and favour. The scriptures expressly inform us that *the Lord loveth the righteous, and hath respect unto their ways; that he meeteth them that rejoice to work righteousness, them that remember him in his way;* and again, *that those who have believed be careful to maintain good works.*

12. In a word, though our good actions, even upon the supposition that we had done all that was commanded us, cannot merit the exceeding great reward promised in the gospel; still they are the indispensable condition of our obtaining it. Though at the best *we are unprofitable servants;* it is not less our duty to obey the laws of God, with sincerity and steadfastness. Though our virtues can give us no claim to future happiness, still they may render us the objects of divine approbation; and divine approbation insure to us, as our future recompense, that *eternal life, which is the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

PART VI.

DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION.

1. THE common mode of instruction amongst the oriental nations was by figures or parables. The wisdom of the east loved to go adorned in flowers, and by means of the imagination to find its way to the heart. This mode of instruction was frequently honoured by our Lord's adopting it. Accommodating himself to the practice of the east, and to the manners of the Jews, he wrapt up his wisdom in this veil, and delivered his doctrines to the people in figures, and in parables. It will easily be perceived that the doctrine of regeneration is of this figurative description; and this circumstance has given scope for fancy to pourtray a thousand as visionary notions respecting it, as irrational and absurd, as that which struck the mind of Nicodemus, when he inquired of our Lord, who first proposed it to him; how can a man

that is old be born again ? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born ?

We will inquire then what this figurative description of regeneration means, and shew in what it consists.

2. According to the visionary notions of some respecting regeneration, the rational faculties are as little concerned in the production of the new birth, as they were in their original formation in the womb. They suppose that man, by the original constitution of his nature, is so prone to evil, and so averse from good, that his depravity is inherent and incurable. This depravity, they think, exposes us from the first moment of our existence, to God's wrath and condemnation. Thus a just God is represented as being angry with us for no other reason, than because we are born. But can any reasonable being seriously imagine, that God is angry with us merely for being born ? An act entirely beyond our control, and in which we had no choice given us ? Our natural birth can be no transgression ; for there can be no sin without the consent of the will, and in this act the will is not consulted. Sin is a violation of some known

law, the doing something which our reason and conscience tell us we ought not to do; but we cannot be subject to any legal obligation before we have existence, and moreover as we can do neither right nor wrong, before we have any perception of right and wrong, it is clear, that we are not sinners by birth.

3. It is God who makes us, and not we ourselves. It is his power which fashions us in the womb, and it is only by his permission that we come into the world. As our existence, therefore, is the gift of God, and our birth the exertion of his will, we cannot suppose that he who directs us to do good, would have given us a nature incapable of doing it, or that he would threaten us with punishment for working iniquity, if he had rendered our nature so addicted to sin, that we could not help sinning. God commands us to do righteousness, and has given us a natural capacity to do it. He has not by any arbitrary decree made us sinners, and then, by an act of tyranny, threatened to punish us for not obeying a law which *he* had previously rendered us incapable of obeying. If we come into the world in a state of total depravity and moral blindness, then sin is our instinct and our nature, and it is as natural for

us to commit all manner of crime, as for the horse to eat grass, or fishes to love water. This at once makes God the author of our sin, and excuses man from all guilt; for all sin lies in the will, and if the will be not free to choose either good or evil, we are no longer accountable for our actions; nor would a God of *justice*, to say nothing of *mercy*, determine to judge men according to their works.

4: If God has made us sinners, or if we are born into the world in a state of total depravity—a supposition in fact which destroys all grades of wickedness, and makes the murderer no worse a character than the most moral man that exists, for if all are totally depraved, one is precisely as much so as another, and then the most atrocious sinner fulfils the will of God as much as the holiest saint, and must be rewarded as much hereafter; for the scripture expressly says, blessed are they that *do God's will*; he shall have right to the tree of life, &c.—indeed it would be not only rank injustice, but absolute cruelty in any parent to punish a child for actions of which himself was the author, or for a mode of conduct which he had irresistibly compelled him to pursue; and shall we ascribe,

then, such a conduct to God ?—Yet if we suppose that we are born totally depraved, so disposed to evil, that we rush into moral corruption from necessity, rather than from choice, we cannot help casting such imputation of injustice and cruelty upon God, however we may study to disguise the thing. The scriptures, we apprehend, lead to a very different conclusion. They represent us as born with a nature *liable* to sin, but as born *pure, innocent, and upright ;* so *innocent* that our Saviour represented righteous persons under the very emblem of little children—(a representation he would hardly have made) declared that *of such was the kingdom of God,* and recommended their dispositions as objects of imitation to his disciples, if they really had been beings so corrupted and depraved.

Besides ; if this doctrine of hereditary corruption were true, it would be a duty paramount to all others not to marry ; thus would it militate with the first command of God *to increase and multiply.*

5. Before men can possibly deserve punishment for sin, they must be *personally* sinners ; they must have wilfully violated some divine law ; for *where no law is,* says the apostle, *there is no transgression.* God

expressly declares that *every man shall bear his own burden, suffer for his own sins, and be recompensed according to his own righteousness.* We cannot then be born sinners, and subject to the divine displeasure, because we cannot be sinful, before we have ourselves done acts offensive to reason and conscience with the consent of our wills; which is a thing that infants cannot do.

6. But if men are not born sinners, how do they become so? The answer is plain. By neglected education, by vicious examples, and the wilful infractions of the salutary dictates of reason, of conscience, and the word of God. Sin is an acquired habit. It is a matter of free choice. If the nature of man were radically depraved and vicious, the wise king of Israel could hardly have said, *Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it;* for it would be impossible, by the most judicious education, to make a child walk in the right way, in whose nature there was fixed an irresistible propensity to go in the wrong. All sin is a matter *not* of necessity, but of choice. But the doctrine of inherent

depravity evidently goes to make it a matter *not* of choice, but of necessity.

7. Man then being born without guilt, free to choose good or evil, but liable to temptation, and capable of corruption, it is plain that a man must be a sinner, before he is a penitent; and that no moral change is necessary to be wrought in the disposition and heart of man, till habits of sin are contracted, and have incorporated themselves into his frame. And then when men have lost the purity and simplicity in which they were born, a complete change in the mind and disposition becomes necessary; then, as our Lord says, we must be converted and become as little children, i. e. become as we originally were at our birth, meek, humble, and teachable, free from malice and all evil works. Here the figure is dropt, and we see at once what regeneration means. An infant needs no regeneration, for it was never a sinner, and regeneration can be wrought on none but a sinner. It implies a strong conviction of sinfulness; moral guilt must be contracted by some actually *personal* transgressions before we can be accounted sinners in the sight of God. Then becomes necessary this change in our

9. In the scripture inveterate habits of sin are called the *old man*, Eph. iv. 22. which we are exhorted *to put off*, and in its stead to *put on the new man*, or habits of righteousness and holiness. Whilst we live in habits of sin, sin is our master, and rules us at discretion. When we forsake our sins, and *repent from our dead works to serve the living God, we become as it were new creatures, created anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works.*

10. But what first induces repentance and regeneration? What first makes the sinner thoughtful and softens the hard hearted? Doubtless its reference is to God, but in no supernatural manner, by no mysterious impression which irresistibly forces the will, and darts new light upon the soul. It is commonly produced by some providence which leads to reflection. *I thought on my ways*, says David, *and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.* Sometimes this reflection is caused by bodily indisposition, by the death of persons who were near or dear to us, sometimes by disappointments in our worldly plans or schemes of pleasure, all which are calculated to cause men to pause, to look into

the state in which they are placed, with an attentive eye, to survey their own character, their future hopes and prospects, and their qualifications for them. Sometimes it is excited by a word accidentally dropt, by an affecting sermon attentively heard, by occasional cautions, instructions, reproofs, or corrections. These indeed must be all of them referred to the providence of God, which placed us in the way of them, and he therefore is to be considered as their author. Beside which he has given the conscience to feel, the reason to judge, and his holy word to enlighten and instruct us. In this regeneration, knowledge, and power to reform and become new creatures are his work. But he works also in concurrence with our exertions and endeavours, and is the author of regeneration in the soul of man, in no other than an ordinary or natural sense, in the same manner as he connects fortune and wealth with industry and prudence, knowledge with laborious and persevering efforts, and health with exercise and temperance. We have reason, conscience, and the word of God given to us; we have instructions, exhortations and warnings in every thing within and without

us; we have examples both to encourage us in virtue and to terrify us in vice. Sometimes these affect us, and sometimes they do not. But if we wait for other means than these, and rely on some secret impulse, on some mysterious communications of grace to be given us from heaven; if we think to sit still, and that God will break the chains of our bondage for us, we may find out our error when it is too late to retrieve it. St. Peter was instructed when the sheet from heaven was before him, *to call nothing therein common or unclean, but to rise and eat.* If we despise or neglect the ordinary means of grace in the visionary and fantastic hope that we shall be called at the proper time by a supernatural impulse, we shall lack of spiritual food, and die at length of hunger.

11. He enjoys decided evidence that he is regenerated, who endeavours to forsake all known sin, to live in unrighteousness no longer; to understand what is his duty to God and to man, and conscientiously to fulfil it. Though this man can give no account of any particular time when he was regenerated, or of any particular experience, or awful, or alarming, or rapturous,

or singular impressions on his mind, he has still the witness within, superior to any other, that his heart is right with God; and *then shall he not be ashamed* when his conscience acquits him, that whatever may be his occasional transgressions, errors, or defects, he habitually *has respect unto all God's commands.*

PART VII.

DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE.

I. WE are sinners so far only, as we have disobeyed the will, and acted contrary to the sober dictates of reason and conscience, so far only, as we have trespassed against the law inscribed in the gospel, or *written in our own hearts*. There must be a consciousness that the sinner has violated some known law of God, and deserves punishment for such disobedience, or else he could have no repentance; for we cannot repent without knowing that we are sinners, and being conscious that we have done something to repent of. And when such has been our case, repentance must be exercised before we can be forgiven—such a repentance as implies sorrow for the offence, a resolution of of amendment, and an actual progress in piety. This sorrow will manifest itself by pricking the conscience

and troubling the soul. In its first commencement it is usually excited more by the fears of hell, than the hopes of heaven. It is a stronger sense of the justice of an offended, than the tender mercy of a reconciled and reconciling God. When men have a just sense of their offences, of their disobedience and ingratitude to the greatest and best of beings, and of the consequent danger to which they stand exposed, both nature and religion prescribe a serious penitential concern for having offended; a concern proportioned to the measure of our sins, and deep as our guilt. What naturally occurs to the first reflections of the penitent is the criminality of his conduct, and this he cannot seriously review without an afflicting sense of his unworthiness, without sorrow and self abhorrence, without painful sensations of remorse, from the accusations of his own heart. Such an ingenuous sorrow, a heart thus penetrated with a conviction of its guilt will be firmly impressed; 2dly, with a determined purpose of amendment, and sincere resolutions of future obedience. The sincerest grief if not productive of this effect is not penitential, but adds to the measure of iniquity, because it speaks a mind conscious of its

iniquity, and yet persisting in opposition to its own convictions. But when repentance begins to shew its fruits not only in the renunciation of habits of sin, but in the performance of acts of righteousness, the terrors of a troubled conscience generally subside in peace of mind, and fear vanishes in joy of heart, which leads to a third notion of scripture penitence, and that is, not only *sorrow for sin*, not only a *resolution of amendment*, but a *new and actual obedience*, a progressive improvement in piety and virtue. A good resolution till it produces the fruits of repentance, is still only a principle of obedience, but not obedience itself. Penitence, in its true sense, is not meant to supply the place of righteousness; is not a thing substituted in its stead, but is indeed righteousness itself, and is to be considered only as another name for religion or moral goodness.

2. A death bed repentance cannot, from the nature of it, be complete; for though it be sorrow for sin, accompanied with a pious resolution, yet it is only a step towards repentance; because it wants the third and most important idea of it; the purpose of amendment *carried into execution*. All the precepts of the

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gospel require, and all its promises are annexed to obedience, to holiness, to habitual piety, without which no man shall see the Lord.

3. If we wish to finish that *repentance which is never to be repented of*, we must begin it early. Repentance, which implies a thorough conversion unto holiness, cannot be accomplished in an hour, or a day, or any short time. It is a work of years, and its operations are slow and gradual. It requires in every man labour and perseverance to oppose and conquer passions, to which he has long surrendered himself; to subdue habits, which have long enslaved him, to accomplish a moral revolution of the mind, and consequently to render himself capable of happiness. As no one becomes profligate in an instant, so no one becomes righteous on a sudden. Some indeed there are, who pretend to an immediate regeneration or new birth, to an instantaneous transition from a life of sin and guilt, to a state of purity and holiness. But such persons deceive themselves by mistaking a pious resolution for complete repentance and amendment. A resolution may be immediately formed, upon some considerations suddenly presenting themselves to the mind, but an

immediate change of the desires and affections, an instantaneous transformation from a vicious to a virtuous frame of mind, is neither consistent with common observation, nor with the nature of habits.

4. Habits, which have long had dominion over the mind, will long maintain their sway. It is only by degrees that the sinner is hardened in unrighteousness, and it is only by degrees that he becomes righteous. Habits of sin, and propensities to evil, cannot be subdued without a long and laborious conflict. They struggle against subjection, and even when they seem extinguished, they will sometimes rise, as it were, from their ashes, and lead us captive at their pleasure. Thus we see the error of those who imagine that their conversion is sudden and instantaneous; that they hear a divine call, that they feel a sacred impulse, that they are sinners one minute, and righteous the next; that this instant they are in danger, and the next in safety; that this moment they tremble on the verge of hell, and that the next they thrill with the raptures of the host of heaven. Such notions serve to engender a false security, and to beget carelessness and ease.

The penitent is never entirely safe; he is always in danger of falling, and the tempter is ever watching an opportunity to entangle him again in the snares, from which he has escaped. Thus then even the righteous have occasion for abundant watchfulness, and much more occasion have they whose repentance is only begun, and not yet confirmed.

5. When the conversion of the sinner first commences, there is a great inward struggle between his appetites, his passions and his conscience, till by degrees he learns to resist temptation, and to replace evil habits by habits of goodness.

6. No repentance can be acceptable to God, but that which works, not only contrition of heart, but newness of life. The conscience must not only be racked with remorse, but a change must be produced in the practical habits; the true penitent will forsake his former habits; his affections will be fixed on other and better objects; he will become less gross and sensual; he will learn to resist, to combat, and to conquer the vicious propensities of his animal nature. As the great work of repentance advances, his mind will become more strongly impressed with

a sense of duty, and the affections more fervid and zealous in its practice.

7. *The carnal mind*, that is, the mind which instead of *governing*, is governed *by* the appetites, *is enmity against God.* And before persons of such minds, who have long gone astray in the paths of unrighteousness, can be subjects of pardon with him, *they must be born again.* The disposition of their minds must be regenerated, and a new spirit infused into their souls.

8. In some sinners, the change which is wrought by the spirit of holiness is more complete than in others. In some the word of God *brings forth thirty fold, in others sixty, in others ninety*, in proportion to the honesty and sincerity of the heart, to which it is communicated ; and repentance has different degrees of fruitfulness. In some sinners, a more thorough and radical change of the mind and affections takes place, than in others ; but no sinners can be said to be established in repentance, or to have had that change effected in their moral disposition, which shall save their souls, in whom all habitual sins are not forsaken, and who do not abstain from the commission of those

transgressions, of which St. Paul declares, that *he who commits them shall not enter into heaven.*

9. Even the regenerate will indeed sometimes offend, but their offences will be few, and will savour more of infirmity, than of guilt. They will not trespass in any matter, which shows deliberate malice and wickedness, great obliquity of principle or settled corruption of heart. Trifling errors and venial imperfections may discolour the purity of their conduct, but these will disappear in the charity that glows in their affections, in the truth, that characterizes their promises, and in the integrity, that will be manifested in their actions.

10. In the gospel of Christ sinless perfection is not expected of us, but we are to endeavour to be perfect, and the more we endeavour to attain perfection, the higher we shall rise above our present state of imperfection. By unwearied activity and diligence we shall *grow in grace and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.* We shall not remain stationary at any point of eminence we may attain, but shall consider one degree of holiness only as a step to another, and the nearer we approach

the termination of our days, the more meet we shall become for the communion of the just.

11. When we perceive the lust of sin becoming less unruly and irresistible, when we find corruption vanishing from our hearts, and purity, modesty and delicacy gaining the ascendancy in our thoughts, and benevolence lighting up its hallowed flame in our affections, it is a certain and undeniable proof that repentance is taking root in the mind, and bearing fruit in the soul.

12. The scriptures seem to intimate that there are some just persons who need no repentance, that is, of notorious and gross sins. See Luke xv. 7. 22. *I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*, says our Lord; evidently intimating, that all men are not the *slaves* of sin. In the Old Testament the people of God are warned to betake themselves to repentance, as corrupted by idolatry, and the vices of the Gentiles. In the New, the duty of repentance is inculcated on Jews who persecuted the Lord, on Gentiles alienated from God by wicked works; on the perverse, the corrupt, on such as have only a name to live, the form of godliness without the power; on such as have

degenerated from their first love, or appear destitute of the dispositions and habits of piety and virtue; on those in whom these are suppressed by sensual desires and vicious habits, who have lived in the allowed practice of things forbidden or the omission of things required. In such persons repentance implies a total change of heart and life, of the mind and affections. Such persons including all unbelievers and notorious sinners, must *repent and be converted that their sins may be blotted out.* They must have *a new heart, and a right spirit.* They have gone far from God and duty; they have involved themselves in guilt, which *soap and nitre cannot wash away.* Well then may they have a sorrowful and contrite spirit. Well may it be heightened by a recollection of all the aggravating circumstances of guilt, the number and repetition of their offences, the continuance of folly, and the resistance of rebukes.

13. But the sensations and repentance of such persons are, and ought to be very different from theirs, who have never been guilty of any gross or scandalous sins. Persons who have been brought up under pious parents, who have been early blest with a religious ed-

ucation, seasonable cautions and exhortations, enforced by good examples and encouragements, usually grow up in habits of righteousness, and pass from the cradle to the grave without any flagrant or mortal sin. These are such as our Lord declares *just persons who need no repentance*; that is, no repentance of grosser sins, which they have never committed. Their repentance, therefore, will consist of less alarming views of the justice and vengeance of God, as their transgressions have not been so much those, which have indicated *rooted depravity*, as *human infirmity*. From early youth they have been accustomed to make the divine law the rule of their lives, the standard of their conduct, and the measure of their interests and happiness. They have lived free from habitual sins, from drunkenness, uncleanness, lying and injustice, and have committed none of those immoralities, on account of which, men will be excluded from heaven. Conscious therefore of sins of frailty only, *not* of settled depravity; of infirmity, *not* of hardheartedness, their trepidations will not be so violent, nor their agitations so terrific. They are conscious that personal guilt alone makes repentance necessary, and that it is

incidental to the violation of the divine laws; and not having committed gross offences, repentance, as implying *a total change of heart and life, of the mind and affections*, is not required of such persons as these, whose lives are thus regulated by the rules of the gospel, and in whose affections the love of God prevails. Theirs, therefore, will be of a different sort, more silent and serene, and such as will breathe only the *small still voice*.

14. But repentance of this last sort is necessary for them; because no sinless mortals are to be found amongst men in the present state—all having received the seeds of wickedness in their frame; all being of the same species, and possessing the same *general constitution* of body and mind as *Cain, who slew his brother;* as *Pharaoh, who hardened his heart;* as David, who violated the most sacred rights of his servant; as *Judas, who betrayed his Lord;* or *Peter, who denied him*. As all therefore are exposed to sin, with more or less aggravation, the scripture speaks of persons under every dispensation of religion, as righteous in a less perfect sense; such as are not free from sins, yet possess the inward dispositions of holiness, and gov-

ern their lives by the principles of a divine faith; who seek to know, and, as far as known, to practise their duty—persons righteous in their prevailing character. Such was *Job, perfect and upright, that feared God and eschewed evil—Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless—Nathaniel, an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.* Persons of this description Jesus Christ came indeed to call to repentance. He requires them to have a penitent sense of their defects and trangressions. He instructs them *to walk humbly before God;* to have *a broken and contrite spirit,* for their *transient* sins, for their *daily infirmities and constitutional faults.* But these he did not call to the kind of repentance necessary to corrupt idolaters, to hypocritical formalists, and to habitual and gross offenders; for this reason, that they are already become, in a good measure, what repentance is intended to make men, and need not the *universal* conversion, and *entire* amendment of their temper and practice. These he would encourage to advance in that path of rectitude upon which they have entered. They have already obtained an interest

in his mediation, and he *is able to save them to the uttermost*. Agreeably to this principle, if any, in a christian country, have grown up under good impressions and virtuous restraints, and have gradually become moulded into a righteous disposition and behaviour, they are not the subjects of that *great and striking change* which is necessary to others. They have already felt the efficacy of Gods word and spirit, or by the exercise of repentance have become that *new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. But to persons such as these, as has been intimated, repentance is necessary; because the whole life of a christian is an exercise of humility, fear and watchfulness. But it is sinners of another sort who are more particularly addressed by our Saviour, whom he commands, in the New Testament, *to repent and turn unto God*; sinners, who have lived in a wilful, or presumptuous transgression, or neglect of the laws of God, whether they have saved their worldly reputation and consequence or not; whether their lives have been *mischievous* or only *unprofitable*. They must literally be *sanctified wholly in spirit, soul, and body; and be created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works*.

Thus the frequent exhortation to repentance is made to the unbelieving, the disobedient and corrupt, estranged from God and religion. But have any entered into the holy profession of the gospel, the practice of all virtue, and *improvement*, rather than *change and reformation*, are urged upon them. They are exhorted *to go on to perfection.* If such however did decline from their profession into sin again, they were still taught, there was room and necessity for repentance; and they were to be restored to the favour of God by the same change, the same deep and solemn repentance, which was necessary in others. The call to repentance is addressed to all habitual and wilful sinners. We can none of us exclude ourselves from the number, by having escaped the most crying sins. All ye in whom there is a love of vice in any of its forms, in whom the seeds of wickedness have not been checked or restrained by better principles, must repent. Ye of evil dispositions and evil works; ye sensual, dissolute, idle, vain, ye who are under the dominion of pride, malice, envy, wrath, hatred, covetousness or ambition, ye who are *lovers of pleasures more than of God, who serve divers lusts and passions, must repent*

and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. Though you have not run into the gross forms of vice, which disgraced the heathen world, consider if under our circumstances, with such superior advantages, a less degree of vice may not involve you in equal guilt? Having had the knowledge of God, and the right way of serving him, those motives and encouragements to virtue, those discoveries of the *wrath of God against all unrighteousness*, of his designs of mercy and pardon through a mediator which never were revealed to them, excuses may be pleaded for them, which cannot be admitted for us? The gospel call then to repentance is addressed to *all*, in proportion as they have departed from the laws of God and retain moral evil.

15. As the effects of religious convictions are diversified by temper and opinions, and other causes, innumerable disquisitions and rules, doubts and solutions have arisen out of the subject. The serious and tender mind has been perplexed and embarrassed with scruples, concerning the necessary measures of sorrow and self abhorrence, whilst many, finding so much

mysticism and passion mixed with the subject, have seemed to think it principally a delusion.

16. If we consider repentance with relation to heathens *called out of darkness into marvellous light*, or wicked men changed to the character of good men, or professing christians, who have fallen, recovered from their declensions, it may be defined a change of mind operating in change of conduct; a renunciation of sin from conviction of its evil nature, and destructive effects. It is a renunciation in *heart* as well as in *life*; a disposition of mind *opposite* to the evil dispositions which have been entertained, inclined to the commands of God. Further, it implies a watchfulness, care, and endeavour *to cease to do evil, and learn to do well.* If we are penitent, we shall avoid and resist temptations, which have overpowered better principles, and apply ourselves to the performance of every known duty. Sorrow, fear and solicitude naturally *attend*, but do not *constitute* repentance. They must ever operate in different measures, in different persons. The degree of emotion is sufficient, which produces reformation. For the sincerity of repentance does not depend on the tears we shed, nor on the terrors we feel, but on a change of temper and life.

17. It may be expected, that he, who is possessed of qualities, or has committed acts, which he knows to be both offensive to the best of Beings, and to put in hazard all his hopes and prospects, will be affected with grief and dismay. Have his sins deprived him of the favour of God, whose favour is life? Have they exposed him to destruction? He cannot reflect upon his situation without disturbance, nor can he at pleasure banish the reflection. He feels himself placed on the edge of ruin. He sees an ocean of misery rolling beneath his feet. Well may he shudder with horror, and pant for safety. It is possible that a person under these convictions and alarms, may feel trepidations, which impede the exercise of reason, may tremble with useless anxieties through an extreme sensibility, and forget all the grounds of comfort and hope to the penitent, which religion affords. But these sentiments and agitations however, are *no part* of repentance, though they may yield some *evidence* of its reality, and promote its efficacy. Passion is short-lived, and a tender apprehensive state of mind at present, is a symptom, but not a pledge of reformation. Let indeed the awakened sinner so feel the evil of his

corrupt passions, affections and habits, that have betrayed him to ruin, and deceived him into a state of pain and misery, that he shall regard them with hatred; maintain a constant opposition to them; a daily mortification of them; a fixed resolution to destroy, and extirpate them out of his breast. But that which makes all this internal change, this sorrow and fear and shame and indignation valuable is, that they produce a course of conversation and life, *contrary* to that, which rendered them necessary. He, who was once thoughtless or impious, must be devout. He who lived without God, must have him in all his thoughts. He who was indifferent to his Saviour must regardhim with faith, love and gratitude. He, who wasmust be under the influence of worldly and sensual passions released from their tyranny. Above all, the penitent must *cease to do evil, and learn to do well.* He must apply himself with care and solicitude, to *keep all the commandments.* To God, he must consecrate his powers, his talents, his opportunities, and *walk before him in righteousness and true holiness*, in justice, charity, purity and temperance.

3. We may hence easily be instructed in the marks and signs of a true repentance. Ideas not represented by visible things, are fleeting, variable and evanescent. We are not *able* to judge of the degree of conviction, which has operated, at any particular time, upon our thoughts, but by certain and definite effects. The only effects by which we are allowed to judge in the present case is the influence of repentance upon the life and conversation. *By their fruits ye shall know them. Hereby do we know that we love him if we keep his commandments.* The true penitent avoids open, known and wilful sins, and strives and watches against remaining imperfection, and grows more and more inclined to good, and averse from evil. Hence he derives the evidence of his sincerity.

19. It is very dangerous and delusive to multiply the signs and tests of religion. In consequence of this extreme, good men are often desolated of their comforts not finding the given marks in themselves, and bad men are encouraged with false hopes. In representing the conversion of a sinner, many persons frame a solemn description of the manner, the way

and method in which it is supposed invariably to proceed, and thus prescribe *a universal recipe for conversion.* He is in a careless state, and regardless of his eternal interests. Some convincing sermon, serious advice, affecting judgment of providence, some extraordinary sound imagined to be heard, or vision seen, awakens him to a sense of his danger and guilt. His convictions are powerful. The terrors of the law set themselves home upon his spirit. He can find comfort no where, and is on the borders of despair. Having remained for a time in this state of anguish and dismay, he begins to find relief, in the mercy of God, through a Redeemer. Beams of light and comfort pierce the cloud, and bring a calm to his troubled conscience. He is then led to fix on Christ as the anchor of his hope, to close with him, and apply his merits and righteousness to himself, to lay hold on the promises, renouncing his own works and righteousness, and thus acquires that justifying and saving faith, which God accepts and approves. The steps of conversion are then supposed to have been taken, and whilst he thus relies upon Christ he resolves to become a new man.

20. If such be the method in which sinners are *sometimes* converted, in how many instances more is the christian character formed, and the subjects of it are strangers to this process of conviction, without these terrible apprehensions at the beginning, or excessive raptures afterwards. When such a deception, therefore is proposed as containing *all* the marks of a true repentance and conversion, or essential to it in every case, it is defective, and proposes either *too much* or *too little*. Many of the best saints that ever lived, never experienced these striking effects, these violent agitations, these devout fervours and high toned sentiments. They have been educated from their infancy in religious principles, were early conducted into the ways of wisdom, and though always humbled for sin, were never in a despairing condition. The prodigal, who had wasted his estate in riotous living, was overwhelmed with shame and remorse, with apprehension and with dread. But the features of this description are not applicable to the *elder brother*, who had continued always in his father's house. He had not gone to those mad excesses, which had plunged the other in a dark abyss of despair, and his mind of

course was not agitated with such violent emotions. On the other hand many who have had all these feelings, have fallen short of salvation. The religion of the passions has existed, without the religion of the heart; and many a one has had terrible apprehensions, and been in raptures with Christ and *free grace*; nay, and even abhorred his ways, and formed pious intentions, and not truly repented and turned to God. Time cools his ardour. Temptation overcomes his resolution; and after all these appearances of faith, repentance and devotion, he lives in a course of sin, not having mortified one lust, or extirpated one passion.

21. *But the tree is known by its fruit*, rather than by its leaves. If having received the gospel any one endeavours to live by it, if his faith have power to overcome the world, and his love to his Saviour lead him to a solicitous observance of his commandments and imitation of his example, if his convictions make him *habitually*, though not *perfectly* pious, humble, charitable, just, temperate and sober, attentive to the duties of his station, he has ground to hope in his sincerity. A profession of sorrow or hatred on account of sin will not avail, without reformation of life. Sorrow is in-

deed but the first step of repentance. It implies also a turning from our sins, and the practice of holiness; and if it carry us not here, in vain shall we reach the journey's end. A disposition to go forwards not put in execution, is of no value. We must proceed as far as time and strength permit. We must run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

PART VIII.

DOCTRINE OF GRACE.

1. THE doctrine of grace has been abused by the wicked, perplexed by the subtile, and mistaken by the credulous. Some have employed it as an engine of mischief, and others have made it minister to the propagation of folly.

2. Most of the promises of grace which occur in the scriptures are restrained to the apostolic age. At present the operations of the spirit of whatever nature they may be, are certainly carried on in secret. They are neither visible to the eye nor palpable to the touch, and they neither supersede the exercise of the rational faculty, nor control the freedom of the will.

3. The first christians could afford demonstrative proof of their possession of spiritual gifts by working miracles, by the powers of prophecy, by different

kinds of languages, and by their interpretation. In our day no such evidence can be given.

4. Our Saviour seems to represent the outward means, by which the *grace* or the *favour of God* is to be obtained, as consequent on prayer and strenuous exertion, on the part of man. *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him.* In the natural course of things man is condemned to labour; he is to earn *bread by the sweat of his brow*, but the world is furnished with various powers and influence to invigorate his industry, and to assist his trials.

5. There are various powers also in nature, which man, by the active force of his body or his mind, may in some measure control, and render subservient to the purposes of life. The earth is full of vegetable juices, but labour is required to elicit their beneficial properties and to make them subservient to the sustenance of man. When man has carefully tilled and sown the earth, he can do no more; then other

powers, the sun, the air, the dew, the rain, the meteor, the storm, all acting under the wise control of a providential hand, combine their varied influences to succour the varied operations of human art and human toil. In the moral world, it is highly probable that many secondary influences are made to contribute, under the superintending agency of the moral governor of the world, to the moral welfare of man, and that his moral endeavours are the conditions of his obtaining their assistance.

6. The spirit of God is universal. We live, move and have our being in the unseen but infinite orbit of its power, and it is probable that its favourable influence on every sentient and intelligent individual bears a certain fixed relation to the right use, which he makes of those faculties, that are given him to profit withal, to the sincerity of his devotion, to the fervour of his charity, and to the zeal of his obedience.

7. If man will exert his natural strength, God will succour his natural infirmities, by strength from above. If man will exert his moral powers, God will further the growth of moral goodness in the soul. In proportion as we labour to become fit for heaven, he will

work that fitness within us. Reason leads to this conclusion, and revelation sanctions it. It teaches us that if we wish *to reap spiritual things, we must sow spiritual*, that if we are sincerely zealous to improve in righteousness, we must first make a just use of our reason and conscience, and that then God will favour our progress, and invigorate our exertions.

8. When grace, or the favour of God, is shed upon us, we are not to consider it as an apology for idleness, but an incentive to exertion. The more our power of doing good increases, the more we are sensible that the word of God *is taking root in our souls*, the more we *should* endeavour, and with greater success we *may* endeavour to fulfil all righteousness. This is to use the *manifestation of the spirit to profit withal, to walk in the spirit, to be worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, and to prove that we are the workmanship of God, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.*

9. Grace explained in this sense, though its specific agency be not the object of any of our senses, is on this account not less a reality. We

know there are many powers, whose mode of agency is inscrutable, but whose benefits are felt, and whose effects are seen. In the natural world heat, light, and electricity, and perhaps many other powers, whose precise nature we do not understand, and whose specific agency we cannot discover, have a very sensible influence on the frame of man, and the fruits of the earth. In the moral world it is probable that there are various influences employed, peculiarly fitted to act on the moral powers of man and to give them strength, in proportion as they are fitted to receive it. The moral government of God in some measure supposes the exertion of such influence; for if God be a moral governor, he must prefer the righteous to the sinner, and is it not highly probable, that he has arranged the moral order of things to favour moral improvement, as he has arranged the natural order of things to favour physical industry?

10. The laws which regulate the moral world are probably as regular and uniform, as those which regulate the natural. In the natural world effects follow their causes in a chain of connection, that is not, except for

moral purposes,* permitted to be broken. In the moral world the connection between cause and effect is probably as close and indissoluble. In the natural world certain beneficial effects are the consequence of certain actions; in the moral world, good or evil seem to follow in a determinate course, according to the previous conduct of the individual.

11. The labours of piety and the exercises of devotion do not change the general course of moral laws, any more than industry alters the uniform course of the laws of nature. But if in the moral order of things, misery be associated with vice, and happiness with virtue, he who avoids the first, necessarily attains the the last; as the industrious derive benefit from the laws of the natural world, of which they would have been deprived if they had persevered in idleness. Thus it may be understood how devotion and prayer, by exciting us to conform our conduct to that moral order of things, according to which the dispensations of good and evil are regulated, operate on our improvement in righteousness and in happiness. That

* As in the case of Christian miracles.

portion of divine favour of which prayer is the instrument, is not miraculous, or supernatural, but the one is associated with the other in the moral order of things, just in the same manner as the fruitfulness of a field is generally proportioned to the cultivation bestowed upon it.

12. Devotion when pure, fervent and sincere *naturally* produces grateful feelings, and impresses a strong sense of duty upon the conscience. But though devotion excite the most agreeable sensations, these sensations ought not to be esteemed supernatural calls or miraculous experiences; for they proceed from causes, and are generated by the moral organization of man, just as agreeable sensations, arising from nervous excitements are connected with, and flow from his physical constitution.

13. Prayer is a help to holiness, and when fervent and sincere, procures a refreshing supply of those wholesome moral energies, those spiritual gifts, which, by whatever name they may be expressed, are certainly ultimately derived *from the Father of spirits*, not by any immediate or miraculous interposition of his

power, but through the channel of that moral order of things, which he established, and the moral constitution of man, which he ordained.

14. If men neglect their worldly concerns they do not prosper, and the neglect of their moral welfare is attended with similar effects. If secondary means are necessary in the natural world, in order to derive advantage from the general course of the laws of nature, so are they likewise necessary in the moral world, in order to profit by the moral economy of the universe. It is not however, the mere act or ceremony of devotion and prayer, which causes grace to be shed on the soul, but it is that devotion, which by habitual exercises, increases our love of God, our trust in his providence and our sense of his goodness, which makes us objects of his favour, which brings us as it were nearer to his regard, and places us in different relations to him, than we could otherwise have been. It is therefore prayer, generating moral improvement, which causes God to give us the good things we ask, because we ask them according to his will.

15. If these notions of grace be true, those must be incorrect which represent it as a mere matter of

sensation, as having sensation for the centre of its agency, as independent on the will, and as bounding its influence on the affections. So it has not unfrequently been represented, not as a blessing given to good endeavours, according to any fixed laws of the moral world, but as some impulse independent of any moral endeavours to acquire it, or any moral fitness to receive it. So it is supposed often to be vouchsafed to the vilest of mankind, to those who are hardened in long habits of unrighteousness, and from whose conscience the very sense of moral obligation seems to have vanished, for want of being exercised. With such, grace is not considered as the consequent of devotion and alms, but as distributed with a capricious and partial hand, often withheld from the contrite, and often lavishly accorded to the hypocrite.

16. If grace be according to their system, a free gift, independent on the exercise of the moral powers, and in the attainment of which, no previous exertion is required and no preparation necessary, then it is an unconditional grant, and in this case, why did our Lord teach us the means by which it might be obtained, and enjoin us to put them in practice? For if God

bestow the influence of divine grace on man, without any regard to his moral fitness, if he require the performance of no conditions previous to its infusion, then men cannot justly be blamed for not endeavouring to obtain it, nor justly be condemned for not possessing it. But, if grace be a blessing on the earnest and vigilant exertions of man to conform his conduct to the will of God, if it be accorded to the fervour of his prayers, and the sincerity of his endeavours, then it is like other blessings in the natural world, dependent on causes, which it is our own fault, if we do not put in motion. In this case grace operates by general laws, and christians are justly accountable for not performing the conditions to which it is appended.

17. The doctrine of grace must always appear dark and mysterious, whilst considered as a glowing temperature of the feelings, rather than an active state of the rational and moral powers; as rather agitating the passions *within*, than visibly improving the conduct *without*. Its agency thus confined to the mere animal sensations of the man, the tokens of its presence must, consequently, vary with the natural temperament of the individual.

18. When moral qualities are regarded as a test of grace, they cannot be mistaken. But if the warmth or ecstacies of sensation are made the signs of its possession, we are soon lost in the delusions of pride, or perplexed by the tricks of imposture. We then set the imagination to work, and that mysterious faculty, when operated upon by so powerful a stimulus as that of religious interest on the one side, and spiritual ambition on the other, produces the most surprising effects upon the feelings. When the fancy perturbed with this delirium causes any violent transport or tumult in the breast, it has sometimes been mistaken for experience of grace.

19. Plain common sense and sober reasoning are, after all, to be guides in religion, as they are in every thing else. But religion is connected with so vast and incalculable an interest, and is often associated with such overwhelming sensations of mysterious dread, that many, who are attracted to the investigation by its importance, are yet withheld from pursuing it by its awfulness. The sacredness of the theme makes them regard freedom of inquiry, as a sort of unlicensed profanation. The pleasurable tranquillity of

their faith is besides not disturbed by certain anxieties of scepticism ; and their veneration for the truth, or their consciousness of its connection with their happiness, makes them loath to inquire, lest they should inquire too far, or discover *more*, than they would wish to know. Thus if they are inclined one moment seriously to inquire into the scriptural proofs of any religious notions they have been accustomed to entertain, the next they draw back with sensations of dread and uneasiness. Thus they allow themselves to go on doubting through life—are led to think that every thing relating to religion must be a mystery, and in proportion to its plainness and accommodation to reason, (the very light which God has given us to distinguish truth from error,) they conceive a doctrine to be less consequential. Strange that any one should think absurdity the test of truth, or darkness the proof of light ! But so it is ; and thus often is the existence of grace demonstrated, not by its outward properties, but by its secret and *unknown* operations ;—and the feelings are made the centre, and the source, the beginning, and the end.

20. Grace in fact, however, can be known only by its visible effects. Jesus Christ has made this the evidence, that *the tree shall be known by its fruits. A good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.* And the *fruits of the spirit*, says St. Paul, *are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance.* Where these are found to exist, there we may be assured that there is grace in the heart.

21. Grace invigorates our natural *power* to do good, but by no means lays such a bias on the will, as *prevents* us from doing evil. It strengthens the natural capacity, but without annulling our moral responsibility. It increases the power to resist temptation, but does not hinder us from being tempted. It kindles a stronger thirst after holiness, but does not close up every avenue, through which unrighteousness may steal into our hearts. It in no ways alters our present state of trial, though it inspires us with fortitude to combat its dangers, and ministers consolation under its sorrows. It accelerates our progress in goodness and happiness, without superseding the voluntary powers of the individual.

22. Grace, then, is given us in order to be improved by exercise, and strengthened by use. To this purpose St. Paul says, *the manifestation of the spirit is given us, to profit withal.* Our physical faculties are made capable of improvement, and their improvement depends on their proper application. So also is grace a possession, which we may either *use* or *abuse*, and which, if not improved, will be withdrawn. It is not a candle that is to be hid under a bushel, or a talent that is to be laid up in a napkin. It is shed upon the soul that we may make continual progress in justice, mercy and truth; and the more we exercise it, or in the language of scripture *stir* up *this* divine *gift of God*, the more will its energy be increased. One measure improved, will bring us another. One temptation combated and vanquished will add strength to resist a greater, till by degrees, *through Christ strengthening us we shall come off more than conquerors* over all the enemies of our salvation.

23. The influence of the holy spirit is given then *to help our infirmities*, and to co-operate with our own natural exertions to aid us on in a progressive state of righteousness, *to mortify the deeds of the body*, and to

enable us *to walk no more after the flesh.* Not but that those who are in a state of grace may occasionally transgress. The most righteous persons will sometimes offend. But their transgressions will never be marked by any flagrant violation of the *greater*, nor by any habitual deviation from the *smaller* commandments. *In many things do they all offend*, and on many occasions mortal infirmity will be visible in their conduct. But notwithstanding their accidental lapses, the general tenor of their lives will prove that they are really dead unto sin, and alive unto righteousness.

24. Grace, in a word, is designed to concur with the agency of human reason, and never supersedes the effects of human exertions. Thus working in conjunction with our will, it is not *irresistible* but is a talent which will be withdrawn, if it be not turned to a good account. We say of ourselves, *we can do nothing*, and it is the grace or the spirit of God, which enables us to do every thing; and we speak correctly; but because grace enables us to do every thing, we are not thence to conclude, that every thing is to be left to the grace of God, and that we need only work ourselves into a strong persuasion that God is at work

for us, and we may sit still ourselves. This is enthusiasm, though too often dignified with the false name of christian faith. Suppose a man wanted to move a weight that required double his strength to move it; would it not be proper to say—of himself he can do nothing? or would it follow, that if he was offered help, he should sit still and not put his own strength to the work? If a friend came to his assistance, would it not be properly said, that his friend *enabled* him to do what he did; but would it follow that his friend did all, and he did nothing? This illustration will very aptly explain the doctrine of grace, as co-operating with human endeavours.

PART IX.

ELECTION AND REPROBATION.

1. THE foundation of all religion is the character of God, and as our conceptions of it are true or false, our religion will be either a sublime system of devotion elevating our moral virtues, or a groveling system of superstition, generating pride and persecution, and every deadly vice. It is therefore the duty of every man, and especially of every public instructor to exert his best powers to preserve the character of God from every unjust and ungenerous imputation, and to rescue the honour of religion from every injurious and illiberal commentary.

2. The doctrines of unconditional election and absolute reprobation though by some christians eagerly contended for, are no ways different from those of the

fatalist or necessarian. They go to destroy the moral agency of man, to justify the vilest sinner, by taking from him the possibility of pursuing a different course of action (for whether the incapacity be *moral* or *natural* is immaterial, so long as it is an incapacity) they cast all the blame of men's sins upon God ; they represent him, as acting an insincere and double part, in first inviting sinners to repentance, and afterwards himself withholding from them the power to repent, and impelling others, by an irresistible force to exercise contrition, and be saved. These doctrines therefore, on the one hand, hold up God as a captious and cruel being, who not only trifles with his creatures by calling them to repent, whilst he has chained them fast in fetters of impenitence, but who punishes them for crimes, which he himself not only tempted, but even compelled them to commit. No virtuous man would even associate with a person of such a character, as these notions make of God. Besides which, on the other hand, they have sometimes sunk the serious christian whose views of the divine character have not been sufficiently enlarged, into a state of melancholy and dejection, and caused him to look up to

the sovereign of the universe, not with affection and gratitude, as to a father and a friend, but with trembling and terror, as to a severe and capricious tyrant, whose government is arbitrary, and whose judgments are unjust.

3. The following is the absurd and inconsistent language in which these doctrines represent a holy, just and merciful being, as speaking to his creatures:

"I behold, through the fall of Adam, by my mere pleasure imputed to his posterity, yet unborn (as if it had been their own action, and they had personally consented to it) the whole race of mankind obnoxious to my eternal wrath, and utterly unable to recover from it; and though they be *all the souls that I have made*—all equally wanting, all equally capable of my favour, nor have I any reason to extend it to any rather than to all, yet do I absolutely decree to vouchsafe this favour only to some few of them, leaving the far greater part of them under a sad necessity of perishing everlastingly for the offence of their forefather Adam committed long before they had a being, so that they shall be as sure to be damned eternally, as they are to be born in time; and yet *I will proclaim myself unto*

them, a God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness, on purpose that they may not perish, but be led by it to repentance, and declare to them that my *delight is in shewing mercy.* I will entreat them with the greatest earnestness, and even beseech them to be reconciled to me, as being so far reconciled to them in Christ Jesus as not to impute to them their transgressions and sins. I will send to them all my messengers and prophets, declaring that I do it because *I have compassion on them.* I will allure them to repentance, with the promise that *their sins shall be blotted out, and not one of them remembered against them,* I will tell them, that *I would have purged them, but they would not be purged, that I would gather them, but they would not be gathered.* I will ask them, why *will ye die?* And enquire, *what more I could have done for them that I have not done?* Yea, I will even solemnly protest and swear unto them by the greatest oath, even that of my own life, that *I would not the death of him that dies, but rather that he should return and live,* but after all, I will be true and constant to that absolute degree of reprobation, which must render their damnation inevitable, and to the

negative decree of withholding from them that grace, which can alone enable them to escape it, or receive any advantages from all those declarations.

4. Election in the scriptures has reference to those whom God selects for any particular purpose from others, as instruments of accomplishing his purposes. In those passages which have given most disquiet to serious, timid minds, the term is used in a national and not an individual sense, applying to God's preferring one people above another, on whom to confer peculiar favours; depriving those left, however, of nothing which justice demands from him towards them, but only withholding from them some temporal or spiritual favours, which he confers on others; yet not depriving them of the means of his *final* favour, and of their individual happiness in another and a better world. Of this kind is the 11th chapter of Romans; which, more than any other, has been considered as supporting the calvinistic construction of that doctrine.

5. In contemplating the proceedings of God as they are represented in scripture, we ought carefully to distinguish betwixt his conduct, when acting in the

capacity of a *creator*, and in that of a *judge*. It is absolutely necessary to make this distinction; because the principle from which he acts in the capacity of a creator is materially different from that in which he acts in the capacity of a judge. As a *creator*, the principle upon which God is regulated is benevolence, but as a *judge*, it is justice. And though acting in this last capacity, in conformity to the law of justice, he may inflict exemplary punishment on those who are rebels to his government, yet it is impossible in the capacity of a creator, that God should originally form any creature on purpose to punish it, because such a conduct would be expressly repugnant to that benevolence which eternally resides in his breast.

6. In the five first verses of the eleventh chapter of Romans, the apostle with a peculiar sympathy commiserates the situation of his countrymen the Jews, under the melancholy prospect of their rejection as the people of God, and expresses the most tender concern, that a nation dignified for ages past, as it had been, with the most illustrious marks of the divine affection, should now fall from its glory and sink into oblivion. But to administer some degree of consola-

tion to them in the midst of their distress, he proves from the 6th. to 17th. verses, that their expulsion from the privileges they had long enjoyed was not a singular or unprecedented occurrence in the divine government, but was expressly conformable to that instance of it, in the patriarchal age, when Esau and his posterity were neglected, and Jacob and his descendants admitted into the peculiar favour of God. Then from the 17th. to 22d. verses, he amply vindicates the justice of the divine administration in making one nation great and another small, from this principle, that God, as *a creator*, has an unlimited jurisdiction over the universe, that all the nations of the earth are in his hands as the clay is in the hands of the potter, and consequently that as the potter, out of the same lump of clay may, without any impropriety, make one vessel for honour, and another for dishonour, so God, out of the same race of mankind, may without any infringement of equality, make one nation glorious and flourishing, and another obscure and less distinguished. And then in the concluding paragraph he shows, that the rejection of the Jews at a period, when, by their infidelity and obstinate rebellion, they had *made themselves* vessels of

wrath, and of consequence were ripe for destruction, was a proper introduction to the adoption of the Gentiles, who, according to the purpose of *election*, were the vessels of mercy; and who, with a remnant of the Jews to be united with them, should henceforth constitute the peculiar church and kingdom of God, according to the prediction of the prophet Hosea; *I will call them my people, and her my beloved which was not my beloved; and it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there shall ye be called the children of the living God.* And to put the matter beyond all doubt that he is speaking of men in the capacity of *public communities*, and not in that of *individuals*, he expresses himself thus; *what shall we say then? That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith, but Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, have not attained to the law of righteousness.*

7. God's love does not flow as that of man often does from blind and unintelligible instinct, but is eternally founded on reason and truth. In an accountable and intelligent being, virtue alone, which is a conduct

agreeable to reason and truth, can establish a foundation upon which God can place his approbation and his love. It is said God loved Jacob, and hated Esau. But God did not love Jacob as a *moral agent*, because his love was directed to him before he had done either good or evil. No more did he hate Esau as a *moral agent*, because his hatred was directed towards him, before he had done either good or evil. The only meaning is that God loved Jacob as a *patriarch*, that is, that he chose or *elected* him in preference to his brother, to be the head, ruler and representative of a people peculiarly consecrated to religion and to heaven, leaving his conduct, both in the capacity of a public ruler, and a private man, to the investigation of that awful day, when every word and work shall be brought into judgment, and every man be rewarded or punished according to his deeds ; and that God *hated* or set aside Esau, or did not choose or *elect* him, as he had done his brother Jacob, to be the ruler and representative of a people, separated from idolatrous nations and peculiarly devoted to the worship of God. At the same time we have every reason to believe, that God left Esau in the capacity of a private man

invested with many valuable privileges, to pursue the path of religion and virtue, and thus to prepare himself for a happiness more sublime and exalted in the future world, than patriarchs or prophets enjoy in the present. The words *love* and *hatred* are used in this passage in the same, and in no other sense, than they were applied by our Saviour, when he says, *he that hateth not father and mother, and sister and brother, yea, and his own life also for my sake and the gospel's, is not worthy of me.* All the precepts of our Lord enjoin love to our friends and even to our worst enemies, and a sedulous regard to the preservation of our own lives and those of others; and who, therefore, does not know, that our Saviour means in this passage nothing more, than that we should *prefer* him and the interests of his religion, even to father or mother, or any worldly connections or any worldly interests whatever? Or whoever imagined that he could design to inculcate a spirit of hatred and aversion from our kindred, and even from life itself, in order to love him and his gospel? In the same sense the words loved and hated are used here, *Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated*; i. e. Jacob have I *preferred* as the head of my

peculiar nation, and Esau have I *not chosen* for that purpose. As a sovereign I have a right so to do, because it interferes not with his capacity to obtain my final acceptance in a better world.

8. As favouring the calvinistic construction of personal reprobation, the history of Pharaoh has been cited with much supposed triumph. *And Moses and Aaron did all their wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of the land.* Here they say there is an absolute act of God reprobating Pharaoh, and, to fit him for such reprobation, *hardening his heart.* Before we examine this subject, it will be proper to observe, that reprobation signifies in the scripture, nothing more than being disapproved of God. Now no man can be disapproved of God till he has *actually* sinned; because then God would disapprove his own works, *for it is he who made us, and not we ourselves.* But when a man has actually transgressed the law of God, then of course he is so disapproved or reprobated; and if he repent not and reform, will by no means escape the wrath and punishment of God. Pharaoh

therefore was not reprobated or disapproved of God, till he had sinned.

9. At a certain early period of the history of Egypt, a tribe of barbarians from the east made an incursion upon it, plundered the country, pillaged the cities, threw down the temples of the gods, banished the hereditary monarch from the throne, and spread over the face of the nation a doleful prospect of desolation and distress. These barbarians, who called themselves shepherds, and who are thought by the ablest critics upon ancient history, to have been the Horites, who were expelled from Edom by the descendants of Esau, having made themselves masters of Egypt, elected their leaders for their kings, and excluding the original inhabitants from the offices of state, assumed to themselves the powers of government. From this period was dated the conclusion of Hebrew glory in the land of Egypt, and the commencement of those sorrows and oppressions, which that people afterwards endured.

Pharaoh was one of those barbarian kings, who swayed the Egyptian sceptre, at that memorable

period when Moses supplicated the relief of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Descended as he was from a race of barbarous ancestors, he seems to have inherited that savageness of temper, which was suited to the barbarism of his birth. Hence he carried with him to the throne a train of dispositions, which were a reproach even to the name of a *man*.

The Egyptian, the Jewish and the Greek historians unite in representing Pharaoh as an unfeeling tyrant and a most cruel oppressor, as destitute of every humane principle and amiable sentiment, as ruling his people with a rod of iron and an arm of terror. Unable to support the severity of his administration, many families in Egypt were compelled to leave their native country and paternal soil, and to fly for shelter to distant climes.

Those shocking accounts which are given by profane historians of the Egyptian tyrant are confirmed by Moses. In drawing Pharaoh's picture, we have the representation of a monster disguised in the figure and features of a man. The sacred biographer, without touching on those cruelties which Pharaoh exercised towards the Egyptians, confines himself to those

rigorous severities which, with an unfeeling spirit, he inflicted on the Hebrews. He compelled them all to work in clay, in brick and mortar. Their service was with every possible rigor, and their lives were made bitter with hard bondage; yet as if all this had been insufficient to oppress and afflict them, he stretched his invention to find out new severities, and at last demanded that *they should make brick without straw*, and in equal quantities as when it was found them. At the review of such unexampled cruelties as theirs, inflicted by this inhuman king, nature stands aghast; the gentle eye of humanity turns away with horror, and sheds in secret the tear of sympathy.

10. We see then, the reason of his refusing admittance to the Hebrews to go and worship the God of their fathers. Pharaoh's cruelty, obstinacy and malice, which are all comprehended under the term *hardness of heart* was the cause why he refused this reasonable request of Moses. He *said they were idle*, because they wished to perform an act of homage to their God. He had no fellow feeling for their distresses, but took pleasure in beholding their afflictions. And though Moses

petioned and beseeched for this holy day, though he wrought such miracles before Pharaoh as were sufficient to convince any one that the hand of God was in them, yet he obstinately shut his eyes, and would not yield even to his own convictions.

11. But to this stubbornness was added also a sordid love of wealth, and natural indolence, which were both betrayed in the conduct of Pharaoh. There were other reasons therefore which strengthened the obstinacy and increased the depravity of his heart in his refusing the Hebrews the liberty of quitting his dominions.

In the early ages of the world the secrets of navigation were but imperfectly discovered, and the inhabitants of the earth were entirely unacquainted with those liberal principles of commerce to which modern nations are chiefly indebted for their riches and their splendour. Traffic and merchandize made but little figure in the world, till towards the times of David and Solomon, when Tyre and Sidon became the public mart of nations, and the grand emporium to which the merchants of Babylon and Carthage, of Greece, and Egypt, and the isles resorted. In these early periods

the wealth of nations and of individuals principally consisted in cattle and in slaves. From the history of Abraham and of Lot, of Laban and of Jacob, and of all the primitive patriarchs and princes of the east, it is evident that in ancient times, opulence consisted in dependants and in flocks. And the sacred historian, or rather poet, who represents Job as the richest of the eastern princes, immediately describes in what his riches consisted. *His substance was seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household, so that this man was the greatest man of the east.*

From the situation of ancient kingdoms it is plain that the Hebrews, including their families and flocks, constituted a considerable proportion of the Egyptian wealth, and, by permitting them to leave his dominions, Pharaoh had sustained a considerable loss.

12. Further, at that period of the world manufactures and the arts had acquired no great degree of maturity. Besides the cultivation of the earth and the watching of the flocks, there were many objects of importance for the promoting of which a number of work-

men and artificers were absolutely necessary. This was the case in Egypt. Pharaoh had many pyramids to cut, cities to fortify, magazines to build, and a variety of works to be performed, which required the united efforts of exertion and of skill. The Hebrews from their natural constitution, and habitual temperance, were a race of laborious and healthy citizens and peculiarly fitted to carry on those labours, upon which Pharaoh had fixed his attention. And from their being regarded as slaves and mercenaries, they were considered as most proper to be employed in the severest and most ignominious services. This therefore furnished a still further reason, why he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

13. This brings us to explain what is meant by God's *hardening Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the people of his land go*—As the passage stands, it seems to give this impression, that God secretly operated upon Pharaoh's heart in such a manner as irresistibly and involuntarily compelled him to the conduct he pursued—This cannot be the meaning however, because, if God did actually harden Pharaoh's heart he was no ways to blame either for the hardness of

his heart or the cruelty of his conduct; for he only did what God compelled him to do. To suppose this is contrary to every other representation given us of God, both in the Old and New Testament, for in no other passage in scripture, is God placed in such a point of view; besides that it opposes what the apostle expressly tells us, *let no man say when he is tempted I am tempted of God, for God cannot*, &c. Now when we meet with one passage which seems to contradict every other in scripture, it is rational to conclude that it admits of a construction, modification or meaning, which will correspond and harmonize with all others. When it is said therefore that *God hardened Pharaoh's heart*, the meaning is, that God permitted him to act out his own cruel and selfish temper, without laying the restraint of his grace upon him. There was nothing supernatural in Pharaoh's hardness of heart; it arose from causes similar to those, by which the heart of every wicked man is hardened in iniquity and rendered callous to the duties of humanity and of virtue; it arose from his cruel temper; from his ambitious desire to increase the wealth of his kingdom, and from the fear that the arts and manufactures

would suffer from the emigration of the Hebrews. Just in the same sense in which *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart, he may be said to harden the heart of every murderer, thief, or burgler, who goes to the gallows, unaffected and unconcerned ; that is, there is nothing supernatural in this hardness of heart, it originates in a wicked disposition, inflamed by temptations and circumstances, and God permits them to take their own course.

14. This account of Pharaoh's hardness of heart may receive illustration from another passage respecting him. *For this purpose have I raised thee up*, says God, *to shew forth my power in thee ;* the meaning of which is *not* for this purpose have I brought thee into *existence*, but for this purpose have I raised thee up *on the Egyptian throne*. You, Pharaoh, being a man of a cruel and wicked heart, I have raised you up to power and dominion, to shew the world my power to punish such wicked characters, and have placed you in that situation, where your vices will be most conspicuous, to convince mankind to what lengths a hardened and cruel heart will carry men, and what cer-

tain judgments are reserved as the punishment of such crimes.

15. To *harden Pharaoh's heart*, according to the idea or idiom of the English language, implies that the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was caused by the supernatural power of God. But, according to the idea or idiom of the Hebrew language, it implies no more, than that God left Pharaoh to his own convictions, without using any supernatural methods to soften his heart.

16. This appears to be the exact sense of the expression, because, further, Moses endeavoured both by entreaty and by threatening to persuade Pharaoh to alter his determination, and to let the children of Israel go. But had Moses understood his own expression in its literal sense, his attempting to persuade a man whose heart God had hardened against persuasion, would have been at once an act of impiety towards God, and an insult to an unhappy man, who, without any fault of his own, was by a superior power, he was unable to resist, plunged into a situation dreadful and forlorn.

Again ; Pharaoh was punished for his hardness of heart, which implies that it proceeded from himself, not from God ; for God would never punish his creatures for what himself compelled them to act. To suppose it, would be to represent God in such a character as he never appeared. For *the Lord God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in mercy, though by no means will he clear the guilty.* Now by the power of God a variety of judgments were inflicted upon Pharaoh, and at last he was drowned in the Red Sea. If Pharaoh's hardness of heart proceeded from himself, his punishment was just. If it proceeded from God, his punishment was unjust. But says the scripture, *Shall man be more just than God? As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts of mercy above ours. Thou art clear*, says Job, *when thou judgest. Justice and judgment*, says the Psalmist, *are the habitation of thy throne.*

17. If the doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation be true, all the encouragements and exhortations, all the offers and entreaties of the gospel, are a mere mock and deception. What motive

can any man have to endeavour to *flee from the wrath to come*, when, if it *is* to be his lot, nothing that he can do, can enable him to escape it? Or what motive can he have to *lay hold on eternal life*, when, if he *is* to enjoy it, he cannot possibly miss of it, or any thing belonging to it, or that is necessary to prepare him for it? What reason had the apostle to exhort christians *to take heed lest they should fall*, when none that did stand could *possibly* fall? Or why did *he labour, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway*, when, being certain of his conversion, he must have known that consequence was impossible? Such a notion as this, renders also all preaching vain and absurd; for it makes the decision upon human characters to be already had, and *the day of judgment to be past*. All exertions, then, towards repentance are useless. The elect *must* be saved, and the reprobate *must* inevitably be lost. Nothing we can do can frustrate the decree. Such is the result of the doctrine; and let men exert all the ingenuity they are masters of, it is impossible for them to clear this opinion from being the cause of fatal despair in some,

and of as fatal security in others. Besides that, it represents the God and father of us all, in such a light, as no just man would choose that himself should appear in. If a man of real goodness and compassion believe in such a doctrine, it is difficult to conceive how such a one could wish to have children, or be accessory to their being born in such circumstances; for, in such a case, he cannot avoid reflecting how great the probability that they, not being of the number of the elect, may thus, by his means, be everlastingly punished.

18. If there are some few scattered passages which appear to favour the doctrine of particular reprobation or unconditional election, it is to be noticed that the current of scripture is directly against them. It must therefore be concluded, that they are capable of, and designed for other constructions. It ought also to be noted, that such passages are often local, or relate to circumstances not existing now; that the peculiar idiom of the language from which our bible is only a translation, is often such as conveys a different sense in our own; that if two or three insulated scriptures

seem to convey any particular notion, and fifty or a hundred oppose it, particularly if that notion go to reflect upon the moral attributes of the deity, we ought to explain the two or three in harmony with the fifty or hundred, or, if that be impossible, to leave them as unintelligible; but by no means to deduce any doctrine from them, derogatory to God's justice or mercy, or any of his attributes.

19. These above remarks apply to the doctrines of reprobation and particular election. A hundred passages at least, oppose them, where even one seems to support them. Why are we called upon to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, if they are already certain? The very injunction expresses that our election to virtue here, and to heaven hereafter, is a *conditional* election, and depends alone upon our improvement of those natural and spiritual advantages with which God has furnished us. God, by an absolute decree, hath determined the misery of no man, nor by an unconditional act appointed any one to happiness. But God's eternal decrees are, *If thou doest well thou shalt be accepted, and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door*

Nor has any one superior aids given him to do well, but in proportion as he has improved such as he has already been furnished with, nor has any one grace denied him, that he may not do well, unless he wilfully resist it, and shut his eyes against the light which continually shines around him.

PART X.

PERSEVERANCE ENJOINED ON CHRISTIANS.

1. IT is the end that crowns any work. If men succeed ever so well in the preparatory steps, yet if through negligence, mistake, or want of perseverance, they fail in the completion of their design, chagrin and disappointment must inevitably be their portion. Unsuccessful termination of projects which had employed much of their time, and engaged to a considerable degree the expectations and hopes of men, have not been uncommon in human life. The labour of months, perhaps of years, has been frustrated and overturned. It is the same precisely in religion. If the christian neglects to persevere in well doing, he will lose the fruits of all his former pious labours. He should constantly *fear, therefore, lest a promise being*

left unto him of entering into rest, in the end he should seem to come short of it.

2. Those persons who do not fully admit the moral agency of man, who believe that christians are made such at first, by a sort of miraculous and secret agency of God's spirit upon the soul, which supersedes the use and improvement of their rational powers, conceive, that when a person is once possessed of this invisible grace, or influence, it can never be lost; and that perseverance is inseparably connected with it; that those persons who have it, were from all eternity chosen from the rest of the world to possess it, and the same partiality founded on no moral qualities of the subject) for he was chosen before he had ever existed) which first implanted, will still continue it unto the end of life, and that a man can no more fall *finally* from grace, once received, than the universe, created at first by the power of God, can be annihilated without his absolute decree.

3. Common observation, and above all, the holy scriptures, intimate a different conclusion; and for one passage that even looks like favouring such a sentiment, there are at least ten, that not only distantly

oppose, but which even expressly confute it. The doctrine indeed arises from, and is a consequence of that strange notion, that God from blind partiality made a choice without a preference, and from eternity determined to save certain individuals of the human race from the state of total depravity in which he chose to bring them into the world, and make them everlastingly happy ; and eternally to torment all the rest of the race, to the glory of his vindictive wrath. Strange reflection indeed upon the character of God. Far be such injustice from him. We should dishonour the most unnatural earthly parent, by such an idea of him. Let us beware then, how we charge upon the Deity what we should blush to own that even a fellow sinner like ourselves could be guilty of !

4. We often see men behave truly virtuous. They continue for a long time, often from youth to old age in habits of goodness, and then fall from their steadfastness into habits of sin and vice. Intemperance and impurity are sometimes seen to stain the last of a life, the former part of which had been virtuous and exemplary. Prayer, which *once* had been habitual, is now restrained before God ; a profession of religion

once made, is now laid aside, and religious duties, *once* punctually regarded are more wholly omitted. But it it will be said such persons never were really righteous; or else they would have persevered. In one sense it is true, that a righteous man will persevere, because from the moment he ceases to persevere, he is no longer a righteous man. But it by no means follows, that he was not righteous *once*, because he is not so *now*. What says the scripture? Directly the contrary. *When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations of the wicked man, all his righteousness that he hath done, shall not be mentioned. In the trespass that he hath trespassed and in the sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.* Ezek. xviii, 24, 26. Observe here, the supposition is expressly made, that a righteous man may fall away from his righteousness and die, notwithstanding, in his sins. St. Paul also in his Epist. to the Hebrews, chap. vi. 4, 5 6. says, *it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, if they shall fall away, to renew them to*

repentance, seeing, &c. Again addressing the same Hebrews who it will be observed had embraced the faith, he says; "*if we sin wilfully,*" by falling off from the faith, "*after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, &c. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, &c. Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trampled under foot the son of God, and hath accounted the blood of the* (new) *covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the spirit of grace.*" The same apostle further adds, "*now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*" St. Peter also says, *If after they* (christians) *have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning, for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,* ii. Peter, chap. xviii. 20, 21. In the beginning of the foregoing chapter the apostle speaks of some, *who should bring in damnable heresies, and these men, saith he, shall make merchandize of, or gain over to these heresies, some of*

you who have received the like precious faith with us. Beware therefore lest being led away by their error, ye fall from your steadfastness.

5. All the exhortations, cautions, and promises addressed to christians, urge them to steadfastness. Of this kind, passages too numerous to be recited here present themselves. Where Timothy is charged to *hold faith and a good conscience*, it is added, *which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck. Ye ran well who did hinder you?* Such also as seek for justification by the works of the law, St. Paul expressly says *are fallen from grace. Hold fast your confidence steadfast to the end.* Hebrews, Chap. xii. *Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, &c. Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward, &c.*

6. All such commands and exhortations to persevere in well doing, to continue steadfast to the end, and to fear lest they should fall away; all cautions directed to christians to take heed that they do not so, are striking instances, that the grace of God is considered as a talent which may be improved, or misimproved, according to our own free choice; and are plain

indications, that God hath made no absolute decree or promise that good men shall not fall. For as these exhortations and cautions are motives to induce to perseverance in christian duty, so they evidently suppose it possible that christians may do otherwise and *not* persevere. Otherwise all the instructions and warnings, promises and threatenings of the scripture, are useless, and have no meaning. It would indeed have been absurd in the apostles to exhort men to what they knew they never could refuse doing.

7. It seems absurd to suppose that God should make an absolute promise that true believers should persevere to the end, and certainly be saved, and yet suspend their happiness and reward upon condition they did persevere. If he had determined to save them he must have determined, that they should persevere, and there is no condition belonging to it. For as a promise made on a condition impossible to be performed, is no promise at all ; so a threat of punishment to christians, if they fall, when at the same it is impossible they should fall, is no threat whatever, for it cannot excite dread.

8. It is not likely then that all these exhortations, commands, cautions, threats and conditional promises, should proceed from the same God, who had before made known to the same persons, his absolute decree and promise, that they should certainly be preserved to the end, and made it one article of their faith that they shall be infallibly thus preserved.

9. Should it be said they may fall, but not *finally*, let it be recollected what the apostle says. *It were better for such never to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to fall from it* ; which could not be said, *if they were renewed to repentance* ; that it is further said, *it shall be impossible to renew them to repentance*, i. e. morally so, alluding to common observation, that it is easier to love what we never did before, than to love the same thing a second time. Jesus Christ says to his disciples, *Ye are the salt of the earth, if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ; it is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men* ; which passage evidently supposes that *the salt of the earth* (good men) may lose their righteousness, and be finally cast away.

10. The doctrine that saints shall finally persevere, is not by those who maintain that opinion founded upon the strength of the new nature within them, on the immutability of the renewed will, or affections, but purely upon the promise of God, that though obnoxious in themselves to fall away, he will still preserve them by his power. Now *his* promise is, *not* that they shall persevere, but that such as do persevere, or *endure to the end, shall be saved.*

11. All those passages in scripture which seem to favour final perseverance, in their natural construction support no such doctrine. Thus, *of all thou hast given me*, says Christ, *I have lost nothing, but will raise it up at the last day*, though often quoted to defend, yet does not support it. In this and all other promises and declarations of a like nature, which engage that God will give eternal life to the believer, the promise is to such as *do* endure to the end; and so includes perseverance in it. Again, *Rom.* xi. 2. *The Lord hath not cast off his people whom he did foreknow.* This text does not relate to foreknowledge God hath of his individual elect from all eternity, but only to his foreknowledge

and choice of the Jewish nation, before any other nations of the world; and only signifies that God did not entirely cast off his people Israel. 1 Peter, i. 5, says thus, *they who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.* This only proves, that they who are preserved unto salvation, are so kept by the power of God, but not *all* believers *are* so kept. St. John says, *they went out from us, but they were not of us, for had they been with us, &c.* that is, these false teachers of whom he is speaking, went out from us of *Judea*, disseminating their pernicious or false doctrines, for had they embraced *our* doctrines, they would doubtless have continued amongst us, the apostles in Judea, preaching them there. *Every one that is born of God sinneth not, for his seed abideth in him.* As those words of Christ, *a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit*, because it is corrupt, does not prove that a corrupt tree cannot cease to be corrupt, so neither do these words, that a man *born of God cannot sin*, because he is *born of God*, prove that he *who is born of God* cannot cease to be so, and then go on in a course of sin to his own destruction. Again, *the water that I give him, shall be*

in him a well of water, &c. is only a figure denoting the tendency of gospel truth in all who meekly receive it, to lead them on to perfection; to make progress in holiness, and in every christian grace and virtue, and to shine brighter and brighter till the perfect day, and that whereas the water which we drink to quench our natural thirst, will neither abide long with us, nor long answer that end, the holy spirit will abide forever with them, who do not by their sins expel him; and so abiding will forever quench and satisfy their thirst after eternal life, as being in them the earnest of their future inheritance.

12. Those passages in the Old Testament where God's unchanging love to his people is spoken of are mostly of a *national* and not of a *private* import. Such as *the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart, &c.* This and innumerable other passages often quoted to prove the doctrine of saints' perseverance, are only *national* promises made to the *Jews as a nation*, that he never would so far leave them, as to have no further thoughts of kindness towards them. But having made a covenant

with their fathers to *be the God of their seed after them*, he would be mindful of them. Many mistakes may, and often do, arise from applying *generally or individually* what was intended *nationally or locally*. *My sheep know my voice and a stranger they will not follow*, &c. only implies that so long as they are of Christ's sheepfold they will not follow after sin; but do not prove that they may not wander from the fold, and then follow the calls of a strange voice when they no longer hear that of their shepherd.

13. It is said, that the doctrine of perseverance is a most comfortable doctrine? It may be replied, it is not the more true for that, for God sees fit to deny us many things that would be very comfortable to us. The whole christian life is indeed a warfare, a race, a journey. Rest and reward are to be our portion only at the end of this journey, at the successful termination of this race, and at our triumphant conclusion of this warfare. Surrounded as we now are with dangers, and exposed to such numerous temptations; *happy* rather *is the man who feareth always*, who never considers his enemies conquered, till he himself has

yielded to the last enemy, and is placed beyond the reach of danger and the power of temptation. Let christians then be rather cautious, timid and watchful, than confident, careless, or secure. And finally *let us fear lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, we* in the end, by falling from our stedfastness, *should seem to come from it.*

PART XI.

EXPLICATION OF EXODUS XX. 6.

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

A SUPERFICIAL view of this passage would lead us to form such doctrines, and to draw such conclusions, as reflect upon the mercy and justice of the creator. To vindicate, therefore, the ways of God to man, and to receive just notions of his conduct and character are of the utmost importance to our religious faith. That he should *visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the faultless children*, has raised ideas in some minds, adverse

to that character of perfect benevolence, which is one of the appropriate perfections of God. We will therefore illustrate and explain this passage. The context is pointed against, and intended to destroy idolatry. *Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that, &c.* This commandment points out its offensiveness to God. Next follows the penalty; *for I the Lord thy God am, &c.* This threatening intimates its danger to man. The propriety of which will appear more evident from the following remarks, viz.

1. That God, as sovereign creator, has an incontestible right to settle the external situation of his creatures, provided their final happiness be the ultimate object of that settlement. Though it must be repugnant to the nature of God to form any creature for misery, or even to inflict it, unless as the desert of its own misconduct; yet when happiness is the final object of all God's dispensations, it must be acknowledged, that he has an undoubted right to fix the outward circumstances of all beings in this, or any other world, considered not as a final, but introductory system to another. Upon this principle, God elected

the nation of the Jews, and passed by that of the Gentiles.

2. God acted towards the Jews in a peculiar capacity. He departed, if such an expression may be allowed, from his original character as universal governor and supreme Lord, and condescended to act towards them, under the character of a *temporal* prince. In Judea he erected a kingdom, and dignified its inhabitants with important privileges, which he denied to the surrounding nations.

3. Like a wise and good lawgiver he not only promulgated wise and good laws, but formed and enforced their observance by the sanctions of punishment and rewards.

4. These sanctions, though strong and forcible, yet suitable to the idea of his acting as a *temporal* governor, and hence the apostle calls it *a law of carnal commandment*.

5. The precepts of the law, so far as they are moral, are of universal and everlasting obligation; and are the invariable standard of conduct to all intelligent and accountable beings, in whatever country they are

born, to whatever society they belong, or whatever public form of worship they profess.

6. But the ten commandments, as delivered by Moses, have in them many things not *moral* but merely *local*, and consequently not obligatory upon men, considered as rational beings, but merely as members of the Jewish commonwealth, which the publication of these commandments peculiarly respected.

7. Thus the 5th. commandment *Honour thy father and thy mother* is a commandment expressly moral, and so binding upon all men, as rational beings; but the promise annexed, *that thy days may be long in the land which*, &c. is expressly Jewish. God promised the land of Canaan to the Jews; but made no promise of a land to any other people. To respectful and obedient children in that land he promised long life. But he made no such promise to any but the inhabitants of that land. It is hence evident, that this part of the commandment is wholly Jewish.

8. And thus the 2d. commandment, *Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image*, &c. is a commandment expressly moral, and so binding upon men as rational beings. But the remaining clause of our text,

for I the Lord thy God am, &c. is expressly Jewish, as will more evidently appear directly.

9. The great error to which the Jews were addicted was *idolatry*. Notwithstanding the clearest proofs of God's existence, unity, unrivalled excellency, and supreme authority; notwithstanding the peculiar regard which God had expressed for them; notwithstanding the repeated obligations he had laid upon them, still that inflexible perverseness of temper, for which they were remarkable, inclined them to revolt.

10. In order to suppress this spirit of idolatry which raged in them, God made use of every wise and proper means, and especially of that threatening of *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon their children*; that is, the iniquity of *idolatry* only.

11. Having premised these remarks, we shall now more particularly consider the threatening of *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon their children*. From the observations already made, it appears that the punishment included in this threatening is *temporal*, that it stands in immediate connection with *idolatry*; and that it relates only to the *Jews*. Hence we infer that this threatening *cannot* be supposed to extend to

men's spiritual and eternal state, that it cannot be executed for any crime but *idolatry*, nor upon any man, but a *Jew*.

12. But in order the better to comprehend the full meaning of the passage, and clearly see that there is no unrighteousness with God, let us take a view of the nature of this punishment. In the Jewish government, i. e. under the government of God, considered as their *temporal* monarch, there were, as in all well constituted governments, many places of trust, various offices of importance, civil, military and ecclesiastic. Every good subject, was invested by his birth with a capacity of enjoying these offices. But as soon as any man became an idolater and disaffected with the government, he that moment forfeited, not only the offices he held, but also the capacity of holding others under that government for ever. Nor was this all; the children of such disaffected and idolatrous subjects, were likewise denied the capacity of enjoying offices of trust in that constitution, for three or four generations, that is, so long as the seeds of rebellion and idolatry may be supposed to exist.

13. Such a threatening and punishment was strictly proper. Every wise and good governor, who consults the happiness of the state which he regulates, must in order to secure its safety, commit the public offices of state to such only as are its professed and avowed friends. Otherwise it is easy to foretel, that its destruction must ensue. For when men, who are hostile to the state, are either employed in council, or engaged in the field, they will naturally betray it into the hands of foes, and finally effect its ruin. To debar therefore all *idolatrous* subjects and their children, who would probably embrace the same religion from those privileges and benefits, which are connected with obedience, so long as that spirit of idolatry might be supposed to exist, was undoubtedly founded on the truest principles of wisdom and propriety.

14. This punishment and threatening were good for the parents. For its object was not to promote, but to prevent punishment, by preventing the crime. The greater the threatening the greater is the goodness of the lawgiver, because the threatening does not proceed from a malevolent, but from a merciful

intention. The goodness of God, therefore, acting as the Jewish lawgiver, is manifest in theatening to punish the revolt and idolatry of parents, not only in their own sufferings, but in those of their children also, because the love, which every parent has for his child, would prove a strong additional motive to preserve him steadfast to his duty, and of consequence to his happiness.

15. The threatening was also good for the children. When a parent possesses rebellious sentiments, his children are most likely to possess those of the same complexion, because, prone to imitate the examples of their parents, with whom they are most familiarly conversant, and under whose authority they long remain.

16. If children, therefore, into whose tender minds the seeds of rebellious idolatry have been cast, and who had been trained up in those principles, were admitted, notwithstanding such education, to those privileges, which are annexed to fidelity and obedience, there would be nothing to prevent the spread and increase of *idolatry* and rebellion in the state. To convince children, therefore, by the sufferings to which they were

exposed on account of their fathers' rebellion and idolatry, of the wretchedness which results therefrom, and thus to engage them to return to allegiance, to the possession of every privilege and the enjoyment of every blessing, is an undeniable instance of goodness in God.

17. Finally, this threatening and suffering are perfectly just. It is not said that the *guilt* of idolatrous parents is imputed to their innocent children. That would be unjust. Neither is it said that the innocent children are *punished* for the transgression of their *idolatrous* parents. It is only said, that *God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children*, or in other words, that God punishes the idolatry of the fathers in the sufferings or visitations of the children. The parent, then, as before observed, is *punished*, and the children only *suffer*. Thus the children of debauched characters will *suffer* in a sickly and disordered constitution, derived from the intemperance of the father. No one complains of injustice in this, because it is only a suffering, and not a punishment. And the suffering is but *temporal*, whereas the reward, if they be virtuous, will be *eternal*. What, in fact, accords with the

state of things, under the ordinary dispensations of providence, was here by a special and particular sentence ordained to be the mode, and probably a most efficacious mode, of restraining and correcting an offence, from which it was of the utmost importance to deter the Jewish nation: because that nation was to be the depository of, and the means of preserving in the world, the knowledge and worship of the one true God, when it was lost and darkened in other countries. The prophet tells us again, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are turned an edge;* meaning by this figure, only to express to us, that the bad conduct of parents must in some degree affect their offspring. Nor is it unjust. For children are considered, as the most valuable enjoyments of parents. And it is always just in God to punish men in their dearest and most beloved enjoyments, provided the children be not dealt with unjustly.

18. The result of the whole then is, that the threat, of which we have been speaking, was at no rate meant to affect the acceptance or salvation of individuals in a future life. This must be evident from the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, wherein some of the Jews are repre-

sented as it were expostulating with God and saying why? *Doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?* And the prophet's answer in the name of the Almighty is, *When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.* Now apply this to the second commandment, *of visiting the iniquities of the fathers, &c.* and the only way to reconcile them is, by supposing this commandment to relate solely to *temporal*, or *family* adversity and prosperity; and Ezekiel's chapter, to the rewards and punishments of *a future state*. And when it is further recollected, as has been noticed before, that the threatening in the commandment belongs only to the crime of idolatry, and that it also formed a part or branch of the mosaic system, which dealt thoughout in *temporal rewards and punishments*, at that time dispensed by a particular providence, the objections, which may have arisen in our own minds to that threatening, must, at once, disappear.

PART XII.

CONCLUSION.

SHEWING WHAT IS THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST, AND WHY IT CANNOT BE FORGIVEN.

1. *WHEREFORE I say unto you*, says Jesus Christ, in St. Matthew's gospel, *all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. But the blasphemy against the holy ghost shall not be forgiven unto men, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.* These words, in their true sense, are neither calculated to fill the impenitent with presumption, nor the humble with despair. To the first indeed they utter the voice of terror. To the last they speak the language of comfort and of hope.

Our blessed Lord, having cast out a devil, and by a power, evidently divine, healed the diseased person,

so that he, who had been dumb and blind, instantly both saw and conversed, by the magnitude of this miracle, convinced many, who expressed their belief, that he was the Saviour, *who should come into the world.* Upon this event, certain of the Pharisees, who formed a part of his audience, hardened by a malice and hypocrisy beyond the possibility of conviction, intimated, that, perhaps what Christ had performed might be owing to some assistance he had received from evil spirits. *He doth not cast out devils, say they, but through Beelzebub, the prince of devils.* The miracle was too plain to be denied, and the effect too notorious to be disputed. The means, therefore, with more *subtilty*, but with equal *malice*, they ventured to traduce, and thought fit to represent as diabolical.

2. To evince the absurdity of this blasphemous insinuation, our divine teacher argues, that common sense must suggest that whatsoever is done by confederacy with Satan, must be something that *promotes* the interests of his kingdom, and not any thing directly *contrary* to it. Because *every kingdom divided against itself must be brought to desolation; and every city or*

house divided against itself cannot stand. Nothing, therefore, more absurdly malicious could have been invented by the prejudiced Pharisees to evade the conviction of our Saviour's miracles, than the means to which they resorted. How absurd to suggest that he, who had actually done so much towards defeating the power and malice of Satan, should be aided by Satan himself. This absurdity he himself notices, when he says, *if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and how then shall his kingdom stand?*

3. Our Saviour goes on to argue, that his breaking the power of devils, his casting them out of the bodies, and destroying their dominion in the minds of men, were undeniable proofs, that he was commissioned by an authority superior to theirs; by the authority of God himself. Now, *if I*, says Christ, *cast out devils by the spirit of God, then certainly the kingdom of God is come upon you.*

4. Ye conceited Pharisees! This is the conclusion, which yourselves are conscious, that ye should have drawn. Instead of which, ye have thought fit to ascribe my miracles to the power of Satan. This *blasphemy against the holy ghost*, calling his works, *the works of Beelzebub the prince of devils*, is an evidence

of such inveterate wickedness, consummate malice, and invincible obstinacy, that it *cannot*, and I solemnly pronounce, *it shall not be forgiven unto man, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.*

5. We see then what is the *blasphemy against the holy ghost*, here expressed. It is *ascribing these mighty works, which they with their own eyes saw Jesus Christ perform by the finger of God, to the agency of the devil.* This must be obvious to every one, who attentively examines our Saviour's discourse and arguments on the occasion, as they have already been stated. But that no shadow of doubt or uncertainty might remain, in a matter of such infinite importance, which would naturally engage the attention of the serious and fearful christian, St. Mark, iii. 30. informs us precisely what blasphemy against the holy ghost is. *Verily I say unto you, all manner of sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto men, wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme against the holy ghost*, hath never forgiveness; *because*, he immediately adds, *they said he hath an unclean spirit.*

6. Not being ourselves witnesses of the miracles of Jesus Christ, may it not be pretty certain, that we cannot, at the present day, be guilty of this unpardonable sin? At least that we cannot offend in the *same way*, and with the *same aggravated circumstances of malice and obstinacy*, as the Pharisees did. Is it not, however, equally certain, that standing out against, and finally rejecting the evidences of our christian faith, attested by proofs so full and certain, is a very dangerous and an alarming approach towards it? To continue impenitent under the faith confirmed by Jesus Christ, is virtually like the Pharisees, to resist and to oppose him. St. Paul has, therefore, assured us, that *if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth*, and have had the gospel of Christ put into our hands, *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.*

7. We will now assign the reason, why this sin is declared above all others, to be incapable of pardon. The ground of this denunciation of Jesus Christ we shall not find difficult to ascertain, if we recollect that the scripture every where assures us, that our sins can only be pardoned through his merits and mediation; which can only be available to us by our sincere faith

and repentance. Now this *sin against the holy ghost* absolutely precludes those, who are guilty of it, from the very possibility of using the means, which are necessary to produce those indispensable qualifications. *It is impossible*, says St. Paul, *to renew such persons again to repentance;* and, therefore, *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.* And why? Because when men obstinately and wilfully reject the gracious overtures, which are made to them in the gospel, for the momentary pleasures of sin; when they contemptuously vilify and deride the sacrifice, made by Jesus Christ, and continually turn their backs on *the bread of life*, to them *the blood of the covenant is an* unprofitable *thing*. And at the same time, there is no other method left, whereby they can possibly obtain the remission of their sins, or be admitted into the favour of God. We are well assured, that *no man cometh to the father, but by him;* and that *there is no other name given under heaven, whereby men can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*

8. Besides, he, who thus maliciously opposes the truth, must, upon the same grounds, unavoidably continue in his opposition; because there are no methods

left for his conviction. If God should send a messenger immediately from heaven to convince him of his error, he can give no greater testimony of his coming from God than the working of such miracles as were wrought by Christ. A man, by obstinately computing these miracles to the power of the devil, defeats all the imaginable means of his conviction. That sin, therefore, is in its own nature unpardonable, which frustrates the *last* and *utmost* means, which God hath ever yet thought fit to use, to bring men to repentance and salvation. It is true, God can, if he please, bestow upon men such grace as shall triumph irresistibly over their unbelief and hardness of heart. But this is contrary to his usual and established method of conduct towards his creatures. Because, whenever man's free agency is superseded, our acts cease from that moment to be moral or religious; and virtue or vice, imposed by *absolute necessity*, loses its essential and discriminating nature. The scriptures represent to us the spirit of sanctification at all times, and in all places, both able and willing to *assist* every sincere seeker after it, as suggesting our duty to us, and soliciting and enabling us to perform it. They represent us, also, as left at full liberty either, to follow or to refuse, as

having *life and death, blessing and cursing, set before us.* If we follow in the path where our master leads, it will conduct us to salvation for ever. If we refuse and resist his calls and entreaties, we are undone, by our own free choice *only*, and by the wilful obstinacy of our corrupt hearts. Hence we are every where in scripture addressed as free agents, who are capable of becoming either good or bad, according as we yield to the impressions of goodness, which are made by God's spirit in the heart of *every* man, or bend to the evil suggestions of our own depraved and vicious inclinations. In this character we are called upon *to repent and live; to forsake our sins and to turn unto the Lord, to cease to do evil, and learn to do well;* and are assured that, *if they who despised Moses' law died without mercy, of much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, who trample under foot the Son of God.* What cause then have not men to fear, lest the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, being set before them, it be finally perverted by their wilful rejection of it, from a *savour of life unto life, into a savour of death unto death.*

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"On all sides the rubbish of the throne, drifting through torrents of blood, crushed indifferently, in its rapid course, friends and foes; like a furious and overwhelming tempest, which agitates the most secret abyss of the immense deep, whose dashing waves sweep the inundated shores, and heap far and wide awful monuments of tremendous destruction."

First Night.

"Greatness of origin, might of thrones, majesty of supreme power, are you then but the tinsel chimera of seducing delusion; the fantastical fabrick of accumulated clouds, piled in the horison at the decline of day, dazzling our imagination with the vivid tints of their dying colours, and which a ray of the setting sun dispels? The sweeping hand of the revolution has rent the veil, the monarch, who was formerly lulled to sleep by the enchanting melody of musick, who voluptuously pressed the down of a royal couch, and slumbered undisturbed under silken undulating curtains, awakes now at the dismal sound of bars and bolts, surrounded by savage keepers, in the horrors of a sepulchral prison, and threatened by cruel executioners.

"The lightning, darting on his stripped brow, gives additional horror to this mansion of grief. But hope, that soothing necromancer, dwells secretly under the horrid vaults; it strews flowers around, and softens the rigour of captivity; it hovers round the unfortunate king, and solaces his poignant sorrows, mingling the delusions of dreams with the reality of sleep! Sleep then, wretched monarch, rest in peace! Hope has closed thy modest curtains, a good conscience watches at the head of thy bed, sleep, monarch, sleep!.....Those, who plot against thy life, are awake; an implacable fury shakes her serpents among them; the thirst of ambition devours them; the shades of September haunt them; these are frightful, they are bloody; they vociferate, the just sleeps!.....Ye shall sleep no more!"

Eighth Night.

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